

santa clara review

139

featuring:

the scintillating
history of SCR

three works of drama

extended 24 page
color art insert

poetry of postmodern
americana

spring/summer 2007

volume 94 number 2

DEVOTED TO

MENTAL IMPROVEMENT

santa clara review

since 1869

Editor
lauren karp

Associate Editor
emily mcmullen

Production Editor
ross dakin

Poetry Editor
phi le

Fiction Editor
julie jigour

Non-Fiction Editor
sarah scott

Art Editor
kristin swenson

Marketing Director
tyrone king

Public Relations Director
lizette faraji

Assistant Editors
mallory carlson lilee chan
chad eschman andrea justo
leslie santikian richard schreiber
mary swift

Editorial Board
kiik araki-kawaguchi ron ashkenazi
david backes austin baumgarten
madeline conner david garcia
laura hayes jaime mccarley
cantalina nguyen shannon reed
missy sanchez liam satre-meloy
kevin schmitt colleen sinsky
matt zenel

Faculty Advisor
rebecca black

Cover art by Caitlin Dyer.

The *santa clara review* is published in February and May by Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California, and accepts submissions of poetry, fiction, essays, artwork, and photography year round. *santa clara review* is not responsible for unsolicited submissions of artwork. Subscription rates are \$16.00 for one year and \$32.00 for two years. Single issues are \$8.00 (includes \$1.00 for postage and handling). If available, back issues can be purchased upon request for \$5.50.

Please send correspondence, including address changes, submissions, subscription information, etc., to:

santa clara review
Santa Clara University
500 El Camino Real, Box 3212
Santa Clara, CA, 95053-3212

No manuscripts or artwork can be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Manuscripts under consideration will be kept at least four weeks. Materials published in the *santa clara review* may not be reprinted, in whole or part, without the written permission of the editors or originators.

santa clara review
can be reached at:
Phone: (408) 554-4484
www.santaclarareview.com

Thank you to Rebecca Black for her continued assistance and support.

Text set in Sylfaen and Century Schoolbook fonts. Title set in Century Schoolbook font. Text printed on 60 lb. Calais; artwork, 80 lb. Bordeaux. Printing by McNaughton & Gunn, Saline, Michigan.

santa clara review accepts gifts and donations to help cover production costs. Please write or call the editor with queries.

contents

volume 94 number 2 spring/summer 2007

poetry

austin baumgarten	1	Sunday Rituals
rumit pancholi	12	Grandfather to a Stranger
gareth lee	26	Song
	27	An Industry of Affection
	28	Mood Traveler
richard boada	39	Falls of the Ohio
j.l. torres	58	A Trail in the Rain Forest
amy marie baldwin	83	i am trying to tell you my body is a can of vegetables, an oven on preheat
	84	a strange sense in a restaurant parking lot
patrick carrington	99	Katrina's Eyes
	100	Fortune Telling in America
bethany reid	114	The Pirate's Wedding
narasa shambhala	115	The Cat
jeffery alfier	129	Leaving Cipriano Pass
michael minassian	130	Five O'Clock
jeanne lohmann	141	Conjurer
	142	The New Idolaters
michael scofield	146	Let's Change Reality, Okay?

plays

andrea justo	15	The Playground
chad eschman	85	Blue Psyche
	91	Grilling Boys

fiction

angie chau	2	The Mailman
gareth lee	29	Maple Shade Twnp.
kelsey maher	40	No Name Woman, Revisited
mark clevenger	55	Mummies
t.j. moran	107	My Puissant Pillar
leslie santikian	116	Healthy Appetite
jennifer bryan	131	Frankenstein

non-fiction

james lower	13	Ashes Along the Ganga
jon killoran	47	The Unexamined Life
liam satre-meloy	102	I Have Been to Babi Yar
jeff lopus	143	A Moment of Many Moments in a Large City
special insert	147	Momentous and Ill-Advised Proceedings: 139 Years of the <i>santa clara review</i>

art

robert tomlinson	59	Revelator #10
kristen jaber	60	Mirrored
katherine harper	61	Series "me and my converse"
alexandra hallett	62	Hotei
pham trung	63	Transformation
robert tomlinson	64	Writing in the Dark #1
megan cutler	65	Thick as Air
katherine harper	66	Splat!
dustin nguyen	67	The Starting End
ross dakin	68	No Fishing
joseph brennan	69	Goldseekers
jennifer gochoco	70	Mizu
kellie flint	71	Nice Catch
lauren swigart	72	Shoe Prints
chris walker	73	Albert Mader
mark gee	74	Girl
steve gilson	75	Citrus
david pace	76	Bereba, Burkina Faso 2007
	77	Bereba, Burkina Faso 2007
jeffrey brodtkin	78	Kingfisher
ana raab	79	Japanese Garden
lauren swigart	80	Mixed Media Flowers
don fritz	81	Garden
cristal friesen	82	A Final Glimpse

letter from the editor

To celebrate the 139th Anniversary of the *santa clara review*, we editors wanted to build a working time-machine. With it we could jump into the future and report back to you, oh reader, about our discoveries. We would know how many more name changes the magazine would go through by the year 3725. We could tell you if the literature of the future is entirely in digital form, or if humans have evolved beyond reading and instead consume knowledge through their stomachs.

However, in the end, our poetry editor couldn't get the flux-capacitor working, and even the Santa Clara University IT staff couldn't help us fix it. So, instead of a trip into the future, this issue of the *santa clara review* offers you a journey into the past. At the end of this magazine, you will find a "Special Insert"—a non-fiction recount of the history of *The Owl* and the *santa clara review*.

The theme of this spring/summer issue is most certainly the blending of new and old. Our cover art is designed by Santa Clara University student Caitlin Dyer, who rescued old copies of *The Owl* (*santa clara review*'s original title) from the University's now demolished Orradre Library. "They got rid of over 300 copies spanning 1871-1981," she reported to us earlier this year. "I took them home and now I draw on them... I wanted the cover art to pay a sort of eerie homage to the distant historical context of the old *santa clara review*."

The theme of time is also scattered throughout our literature sections. This issue's poetry focuses on what we have come to identify through recent history as distinctly American. Both the fiction and non-fiction sections contain topics as contemporary as anorexia and Hurricane Katrina, and as timeless as thanatophobia. This issue also contains an extended, 24-page art insert, as well as a section featuring plays.

We hope you enjoy this issue, that you have enjoyed our literary offerings in the past, and that you will continue to do so in the future.

sincerely,

lauren karp
and the *santa clara review* editors

Sunday Rituals

Big Ass Roy sits in his jacked-up truck as I pull into the lot. I turn off the Country Top 40 and grab my belt and my wraps from amidst the energy drink cans and dark chocolate chip and pecan cookie crumbs that litter my floorboards. Roy reprimands me for eating junk, but I try not to take nutritional advice from people over four hundred pounds.

Hoss arrives in his Lexus, sipping a latte lamenting Israel's ceasefire with Hezbollah—unusually articulate for a man who squats over 1,000 lbs. Then Jackass, Cubby Bear and big fat Steve open up unit F, and the stink of dead flesh welcomes us. Trying not to vomit, we open up the lift gate, and see an old Hmong churchgoer hosing off bloody tarps in the back lot. He waves at us and smiles. We all wave back. They must have slaughtered a cow last night.

The old guys rub veterinary liniment into their shoulders and elbows, Jackass cranks up the gansta rap, and I rub and clap my chalked hands together. As I lay down on the bench I smell the boiling beef, then dig my palms deep into the knurling. The guys shout "Belly up!" "Big air!" and "Tuck! Tuck!" as I strain and press. Little girls stare at us, like they're at the zoo and we're big hairy gorillas and fat wallowing hippos. Exhausted, I sit up to catch my breath and stare back at the brown faces, all those small bodies dressed in their Sunday best, paper plates in hand, waiting for the feast.

The Mailman

Viet Tran raised his elbows, spread his wings, and was gliding through the white crane movement when he caught himself holding his breath. He tried his best to concentrate on a slow steady flow but was anxious and had to remember to exhale. He attempted his one-legged rooster posture, lost his balance, and had to brace himself on the table's edge. A wave of vertigo washed over him accompanied by a dull static buzzing in his ears. It imitated the roaring lull of the seas, reminding him of how the dead always surfaced along with his dreams. Twenty years ago, Viet had seen himself as chancellor at a University. Today, he would be content as an accountant, with a desk to sit at, a respectable salary.

Nobody would believe that Viet had ever killed a man. His friends in Vietnam often described him as gentle, kind, a man of letters, fanatical about chess, a good family man. His co-workers from the post office would probably say he was a simple man, a hard worker, a great listener. Viet's physicality and bodily strength wouldn't be mentioned. And yet there was a time in history, between continents, when he had taken a man's life with his bare hands.

Slicing his palms through the air, Viet guided his *chi* into the golden platter, directing the energy clockwise and allowing the circle to grow with each rotation. His fingertips began to tingle and he'd just entered into a rhythm when he heard the flapping of sheets, the clacking of blinds, and then the patter of his wife's slippers on the plastic mats covering their floors.

Huong said, "You should practice interviewing, not *tai chi*."

"You can't practice for it."

"I can dye your hair," she said.

"You did it last month."

She combed her fingers through his hair. He lost his posture. "Why are you up so early?" he asked. Huong ground her coffee beans.

His wife worked the night shift at an electronics firm assembling circuit boards. The lack of sleep curled up in sulky half moons beneath her luminous eyes. Viet wanted to ask her for another thirty minutes for his practice, but he didn't.

He didn't want her sullen, tucked away in her bedroom with the blinds drawn. He returned to his postures. Viet was determined to shut out the busy noise but heard rock music blaring from one room and a blow dryer firing from another. His girls were up now too. Huong tapped him with the remote. "Father, can you move over a little? I can't see."

In the waiting room at Linkenheimer LLP, Viet noted four other applicants. They were nicely dressed, attractive, well-groomed, and perhaps half his age. They reminded him of his students in the fall, at the start of the term, fresh-faced and eager, when school meant the promise of knowledge and smelled like a new book. Viet patted his hair, hoping to shift the gray into hiding. He shuffled the papers inside his manila folder. The person who had helped him put his resume together said, "You don't need to bring those diplomas from Vietnam." But Viet continued carrying these yellowed fading certificates, reminders of who he was and what he'd once achieved.

The woman who gave him the written tests said, "Mr. Tran, you have a Ph.D. in philosophy and a law degree too. Are you sure you're not overqualified?" Her expression was sincere and she asked it without the skepticism he sometimes heard.

"I be fortunate as state tax associate here, Miss."

She smiled and said, "Good luck, sir," and closed the door behind her. She left him with tax laws to manipulate, sales and use taxes, property taxes, state tax controversy resolutions, and credit taxes too. His number two pencil swam through the test sheets. He understood long ago that numbers, like letters, were interpretable and malleable, dependent solely on perspective.

Viet finished early. He pushed his chair back and stood to leave. But when he thought about how desperately Huong wanted him to get this job, he sat down again, remembering what she'd said the first time they met. "The man of perfect virtue is cautious and slow in speech."

They were at a corner deli off of campus and Viet was with his best friend, an economics professor. The best friend was talking too much, trying to impress the young co-ed while Viet stayed quiet because he wasn't sure what to say. He was unnerved by her beauty, the haunting eyes, the see-through skin, the blue of the veins on her wrists. And then those eyes turned to him, her mouth opened, and she quoted the Confucian saying. Years later, Huong confessed that she'd

known all along that he was a philosophy professor, “the one rumored to be obsessive about the ancient Chinese.”

Yet as he sat on the 22nd floor of a downtown skyscraper looking down at the tiny dots below, Viet held on to the advice of the clever young flirt. He double-checked his answers. The remaining time he spent writing down his favorite Confucian anecdotes on the back of an old grocery receipt.

Back at the post office, his co-workers, “the crew,” they liked to call themselves, stood over their bins sorting mail by zip code.

“Where you been, little guy?” asked David.

Viet nodded a hello. He had told David before that in his country younger persons greeted elders with respect but the boy either chose to ignore it or had already forgotten. Viet thought how embarrassing it must be to throw about careless words and not even realize it.

Melvin said, “What’s up, little man?” and continued with his story. “Yep, like I was saying met me a sweet baby Saturday night.” Viet stepped in and took the only bin available between the part-time student and the playboy.

“How sweet?” asked David.

Melvin paused and licked his lips. “So sweet, she was like unwrapped candy. Sugar and molasses spilling outta her unbuttoned shirt.”

Viet felt sorry for the two women in the group. They were outnumbered and had to listen in on the talk of depraved men. One woman rolled her eyes and smacked her gum saying, “You’re so gross, Melvin.” But the other woman stepped forward. She blushed a guilty rouge color and wiped the steam from her glasses.

Perhaps I am too sensitive, Viet thought.

Viet didn’t talk much because his English embarrassed him. His co-workers didn’t ask much of him either. They told stories amongst themselves and whispered secrets he pretended he was oblivious to. Viet realized that each person possessed his own hopes and fears. But every day, it was the same continual banter. One woman always talked about her unfaithful boyfriend. The other gushed about celebrity gossip. David talked about the Chevy Malibu he was fixing up and the places he’d go. Melvin talked about the girls, the endless line of anonymous bodies with interchangeable heads.

He let their words pass with the hours. It was like the French

cargo planes of his youth, white noise so thunderously loud it became an indistinguishable drone. The postal work was tedious and Viet kept his mind alive by composing poems in his head for his daughters. During breaks, he'd write out the lines on scratch paper and then in the solitude of night when all the women in the house were sleeping, he recopied the poems on a linen scroll in calligraphy. He saved them as wedding gifts for his daughters.

At lunch time, his oldest daughter strutted into the post office. It upset him to see her, mid-day, out of class. She made a striking impression though, big smile and lithe limbs swinging. She had her waist length hair braided into cornrows. They pulled so tight on her scalp it gave her a feline-like appearance.

"Everything ok? Why you not in school?" Viet asked.

"Hi to you too, Dad." She was chewing bubble gum.

"Answer me." He paused to look over the braids, the blackness of it; decided she still looked pretty, refrained from comment.

"Mom wanted me to bring you lunch." She handed over a grocery-sized brown paper bag. At fourteen, she already stood his height, and leaned in, whispering, "How was your interview?"

"Good," he said, "good." He looked in the bag and saw a glass jar of homemade soymilk. There was also a Tupperware container with white rice and what looked like steak (and probably was because Huong always made his favorite dishes on special occasions). A fork and knife were rolled and rubber-banded in a paper-towel.

Melvin came up and said, "Viet, man, how come you never introduce me to your family before?"

"This my daughter, Thao," said Viet before reconsidering, wondering if he should have introduced her by her other name, Elle. He was about to correct himself. He was about to tell his daughter that this was his co-worker, Melvin. But when Viet looked up, Melvin already had his hand reaching out at the girl.

Melvin was smiling, all mouth, and big white teeth. "Pleasure meeting such a beautiful young lady. I'm Melvin. You call me Mel, alright?" He winked.

Thao shook his hand and said, "Good meeting you, Mel." Then she stepped away, turned to Viet and said, "My friends are waiting outside."

Viet walked her to the doorway and watched her clicking down the halls, stirring up dead air with her swinging arms. Viet was in awe

of his daughters, their quick minds, their ability to adapt in this new world. He admired their pliable female tongues that danced and twirled in a storm of lyrical English. He marveled at their grace and courage, forced to age beyond their years. His wife always lectured them, “Be thankful we made it here. In Vietnam, they don’t even have food to eat.” In such moments, Viet often thought his daughters did nothing to deserve their adult mess, their wars. It seemed to belittle the human spirit to always be grateful that things could be worse. Of course he’d never speak these thoughts to Huong on the couch with her remote, vigilantly watching the twenty-four hour news channel, waiting for the next cruel blow to hit.

When Viet returned with his sure quiet steps, nobody noticed. Melvin was at it with another one of his stories. He said, “Shit, the girls be lovin’ big Mel.” Viet went about his last-minute chores. He barely listened while the other men surrounded Melvin with their eager attention. “Girls these days, might be lookin’ like nice little schoolgirls but you know they be all nasty in the bed.” The other men agreed, what with the make-up these girls wore, all done up, difficult to tell their age. Only young David rolled his eyes and mumbled something beneath his breath.

Viet put on his jacket and grabbed the can of stale breadcrumbs for the birds he’d feed from the park bench across the street. He was about to leave when he heard, “That Thao, wouldn’t mind having baby in bed.”

Viet couldn’t believe he heard his daughter’s name come out of Melvin’s mouth. “Who would’ve thought? Fine little thing coming outta...” Melvin continued.

The room bulged and Viet’s vision flattened out and grew fuzzy all at once. He braced himself and held on to the back of a chair. In his ears there was a sound like ball bearings rolling and grinding against each other. Viet grew so hot his fingertips burned. He could feel the wet between his toes. When he took a seat, the cool of the metal folding chair shocked him. He tried taking deep breaths and even imagined himself back in his living room doing *tai chi*. None of it helped. Viet put the can and the bag on the floor by his feet. He leaned over and massaged his temples. Over the roar, he heard the bragging baritone voice say, “Then at the end, she said *Mel*, playing all sweet and cozy like.”

Viet sized up the room. He looked at the cloth bags bulging

with mail, the bins, and the lockers. Melvin and his mouth stood exactly ten steps away. Viet counted. Melvin's foot rested on the wood bench in the center of the room. He was bent over with his elbow on his knee. The other men hovered around him like ants devouring dead debris. Viet picked up his lunch bag. Inside, the blade poked out from the paper towel.

Their boat had been drifting for a night and a day on the South China Sea. He was below deck with Thao. They were molding rice balls with their palms and he was teaching her how to count. Already, his daughter was quick with numbers and he knew that by the end of the day, she'd be able to count to at least twenty-six for each of the mouths they had to feed.

Thao yelled "Twelve!" at the top of her lungs.

Viet reached over to pat her head just as the boat swayed forward and he lost his footing. "That must have been a big wave," he said. She giggled holding her belly but stopped when they heard a woman screaming overhead.

"Papa, what's that?"

A stampede of footsteps rushed to the side of the deck. "Shut up! Shut up!" The man spoke in a crude Vietnamese placing the emphasis on all the wrong vowels.

Viet put his finger to his lips. He kneeled down and placed a rice ball in Thao's hand. "It's like playing hide-n-go-seek, okay? Stay under this blanket until I come back for you." He kissed her forehead and closed the closet door.

Viet grabbed a knife and climbed the five steps knowing what he'd see before he even looked. Viet remembered his best friend, Huong's one time suitor, warning, "It's suicide. Don't go. If the Communists don't catch you, you risk the boat sinking. If the boat doesn't sink, the pirates are there to kill you."

Through the hole of the rusted sheet metal, Viet saw two men in shabby western dress. The taller one was unbearably thin. He wore bell-bottoms. His eyes were hidden behind a pair of mirrored aviator sunglasses and a mop of shaggy hair. He could have easily been one of Viet's students, languid, underfed, dreamy, with that fashionable look the girls were beginning to favor. Fashion boy shoved the families to the front and gestured with his knife like it was a wand. He yelled in his stilted Vietnamese, "Move! Faster! Faster!"

The shorter one looked like a bulldog with thick shoulders, a ferocious under-bite, and puffy eyelids. He wore a faded nicotine-white undershirt and brown pinstriped pants from the bottom half of a once nice suit. Viet couldn't identify where they were from until the bulldog said, "We're never doing this again. We should have stopped. They have less and less, these fucking refugees." He spoke Chinese. Fashion boy was grinding his jaw at such a rate, Viet thought he'd wear his teeth down to a paste. The bulldog said, "Bitch, did you get high again?"

The short one was older and clearly the brains. He walked along the deck, assessing each passenger one by one. Finally, he picked old man Phuc. Viet thought, you fool, let him go. He has nothing you'd want. Old man Phuc didn't care about money. He was a poet who'd fled his homeland with only a book of his own censored poems he read to the others at nightfall; memories of the Mekong, its dark fertile soil, and the tides of schoolgirls in white *ao dais* from his youth. The old man had his arms raised in surrender when the bulldog slid the knife sweetly, gently, in smooth line, as a warning slit across his throat.

When the blood rose and dripped down his collar, his wife finally broke through the crowd. "Take it," she cried and pulled down her pants. Beneath the roll of her pale belly and above her pubic mound, she had wrapped seven gold necklaces in a handkerchief and duct-taped the elderly couple's life savings on her pelvis.

Only two men and two knives and yet Viet knew why his friends didn't fight. They were boat people, half dead, no fight left, and so they dropped their gold and any fragments of hope into the dirty burlap sacks. The pirates moved through the crowd with ease. These families were already trained to lie down, close their eyes, take it, and wait for the abuse to pass.

When the men reached Huong, she took off her jacket and held it out by the collar. Viet thought, good girl, give them what they want. But the pirate stopped. He took his knife and pointed it at her chin. She covered her throat. He used his knife to wave her hand away. She dodged the blade but immediately slapped her hand back and covered the Buddha at the hollow of her throat.

The other passengers pleaded with her. "Forget it!" "Give it to him!" "Hand it over!"

Viet could hardly breathe. His fear tasted like a fistfull of copper pennies jammed in his mouth. He knew his wife wouldn't give up

her jade Buddha without a fight. Instead she pushed her jacket into the bulldog's chest. With her hands she showed him the hard nuggets of gold and jewelry she had hand sewn into the quilted lining of the fabric.

The bulldog screamed at her until a wad of spit landed on her chin. Huong would later say he had horrible decaying breath and because she found this so foul she couldn't stop her tongue. "You are animals, dogs," she sneered in his face. "You rape the raped."

He didn't understand her, but he knew she'd cursed him. He grabbed her hair and shoved her face into the deck with such force the other passengers flinched. He yanked her pants and panties down to her knees. She struggled and kicked beneath him, but he had her pinned. When he pulled his pants down, his zipper got caught. The bulldog couldn't free himself with only one hand.

Viet knew this moment was all he had. He found the spot to aim for, the jugular. He counted the man about eleven paces away but he was nervous because his eyesight was poor, his glasses were foggy, and his lenses were scratched from wedging his face against the rusted hole of the door.

From the closet, Thao whined, "Papa, I don't want to play anymore."

He said, "The game's almost over." Viet chanted over and over in his mind, *Strike first, strike first*. With his knife pressed against his thigh, he thought, if I fail my girls will lose not just one but two.

Viet tightened his grip on the handle, slid his other hand on the door knob, inhaled, exhaled, and pounced. He snapped the bulldog's chin back. The knife met resistance at first. But Viet plunged the blade in, worked it through, and twisted it. The cut was deep and swift. The blood came flooding out.

Finding courage in the professor's bravery, the other men attacked the taller one. Fashion boy was so high he was practically defenseless despite his weapon.

Viet left the dead pirates on the deck, let the other men dispose of them, and went to retrieve his daughter from the closet below deck.

Viet was their hero, but he retreated into silence.

Huong said, "You did the right thing. Why are you sad, Father?"

"I did the weak thing," he said. "It's easy to inflict harm. It takes

nothing.”

“You did it for us. Family,” she said. Huong kissed his forehead and held him. She rocked him in her arms, her husband, who at home refused to kill a spider no matter how she begged. It too deserves life, he’d say before setting it free from his toilet paper grasp into her gardenia bushes.

Viet sobbed for days over the fragility of life, for the life he had taken, and the one he was given. He cried for having witnessed the weakness of men, who preyed on the innocent and the poor. He held his head in stained hands, believing he’d failed himself because he’d done the unthinkable and killed a man. He was so common, crude as the rest, unable to live up to the non-violence he preached, wasn’t the gentleman he always aspired to be.

Viet held his head in his hands. He had sweat stains under the armpits of his regulation short-sleeved postal shirt. His lunch was perched on his lap.

“She had her hair all braided up so you know she be liking the brothers,” Melvin said, carrying on.

Viet’s heart had only had one desire and his body was moved to only one goal. *He needed to shut this man up.* He sat trembling with his entire arm hidden inside the big brown grocery bag. Inside, he gripped the knife in his hand. David turned around, saw Viet, and signaled the others.

Melvin finally caught on. He said, “Damn Viet, why you be all eavesdropping and shit? Sitting there all quiet, man, I didn’t know. Shit.”

“You not a good man,” Viet said his chin up. “My daughter, she fourteen, she a nice girl.”

“I was only saying nice things about her, man. *Real nice.*”

A couple guys laughed under their breath, saying, Damn Melvin, you’re a nut.

Viet stood up and the folding chair squeaked across the floor. He cradled the paper bag with his hand, still clutching the knife inside. “You disrespect her,” he said. He felt the vein in the middle of his forehead pumping. It rushed blood to his ears. It brought him back to the emptiness of the seas, its violent waves. His vision swayed. But when he blinked and refocused, it was Melvin’s eyes that he tracked. The black man’s gaze stopped at Viet’s shirt. It was so wet it was now transparent

and Viet's ribbed undershirt showed through. Then the eyes moved to the brown paper bag and stayed there. They squinted, straining to understand what was inside. Viet tried to control his trembling and told himself, *shut him up, strike first, strike first*.

Melvin said, "I'm sorry, man."

Viet wouldn't let him finish. "You disrespect her," he said. "You talk about her, only fourteen, like whore." Viet found his amplified voice almost unrecognizable.

"Don't do nothing crazy," Melvin said.

"You disrespect me!"

"I was just foolin' around but I shouldn't a been talking like that." Melvin held his hands up in front of his chest, palms out. "Don't be mad now, come on."

Viet whispered it again: you disrespect *me*, beneath his breath, and exhaled before letting go of the knife.

Melvin, arms wide-open said, "I like you, you a cool little cat. I didn't mean nothin'. I swear. I didn't mean no disrespect."

"You see her again, you apologize," Viet said, dropping the bag.

The glass jar cracked. The soymilk leaked through the brown paper. Nobody noticed. Their eyes were fixed on big Melvin's arms wrapped around Viet, hugging him tight.

"Next time, just tell me to shut up alright?" Melvin laughed. Smothered in Melvin's overly jovial embrace of *brotherhood*, Viet remembered a Confucian saying and repeated it in his head. *Don't worry if people don't recognize your merits; worry that you may not recognize theirs.*

Melvin slapped him on the back and said, solemn and concerned, "Man, why don't you come with us today? Chill with the boys." Viet felt foolish looking down at his brown shoes and the soggy corners of the brown bag. He was thankful for their easy forgiveness, but declined. He wanted more than anything to sit alone, at the bench with the birds, and eat his lunch quietly.

Grandfather to a Stranger

These days, Grandfather speaks in shorter sentences, throws fits, screams for a grandson lost to faggots. Tonight, though, his raspy voice cracks while I sleep, begging for unguents to stop the burning inside his soles, around his wrist, at his mouth.

Laying on his bed

like a small bendable toy he mumbles the name of my lover, Andrew, as a mantra, a catchphrase he repeats *Andrew-Andrew-Andrew* until it is *ruin-ruin-ruin*. Then, he echoes my own name, *Rumit... Rumit... Rumit*, rushed, run together like words he had heard at the market by *hijras*, phlegmy trannies, their meaning confounding, rolling in his tongue.

In it, I drop a lozenge to lull his murmurs, as he had done with me when he could not explain why these *hijras* dress up in saris, gaudy bangles and bindis. He'd warned once, "Close your eyes if they come by. Pretend you're asleep."

I tuck a pillow under his head, massage his bony thighs as he asks me my name again, thanks me, this stranger for his help, his family has not visited in years, his grandson could not explain why he dressed as a woman. Beady eyes below weary lids, hair spirally and scant under the screened orange glow from a lamp, I stare at him until he asks me to explain

what was wrong, don't I have a lover to go home to? He coughs, turning to his side, mumbling the three words again. In the dark reflection, I see him smile, as if part of him happily busy working our names together while another part pretends to be asleep.

Ashes Along the Ganga

I watched them as they burned. Those people. Or rather the bodies those people left behind. There, on the ash-caked platforms along the Ganges River, there are always bodies burning. The greatest honor for Hindus in death is to be cremated on those banks, to be broken down into dust, smoke, and cinders, and then swept into the river's flow to wash out to sea and to the next life.

I'm not Hindu. I don't claim to know quite what I am, but I do know that India's hallowed city of Varanasi is at once a more real and more spiritual place than any other I've ever known. Life there is hard: people suffer, people starve, people die and burn. Buildings crumble, streets are lined with filth. Shit is everywhere. Scar-faced street children with ancient eyes scramble and beg and harass to get their fingers on a few rupees so their parents won't beat them severely at night. The air is choked with clouds of exhaust, curry spice, incense, the fumes off old flaky shit from yesterday, or steaming hot freshness just left in the alley by the man who'll soon sell you your tea. Life there couldn't be more alive, and yet it is pervaded by death and ashes.

One night I wandered through a labyrinth of narrow alleyways, a map of which must resemble shattered glass, all the while steadily sloping downwards towards the river. Suddenly, chants echoed down from the alleys behind me, a group of voices, of men, their chants in unison, growing louder. And they appeared, about ten of them, black moustaches and wiry limbs, a burdened stretcher upon their shoulders. To let them pass, I had to step into the gutter and press my back against the wall. Their stretcher passed before me, garlands of white flowers strewn atop gold and scarlet sheets. Beneath these lay a faintly familiar form that shuddered slightly with each step. Someone was under there, some loved one, their last breath already drawn and exhaled, their body growing cold before being brought to the river's edge. I followed them, those men and their body, because I wanted to see. I'd heard of the burning, of Hindu souls released from flesh, and some thread between me and loved ones I'd lost pulled me along after their procession. When we neared the water, they disappeared into the crumbling Manikarnika

temple, leaving me to stare above it into the blackness, a thick, white plume of smoke wafting up away from me to be carried downriver by the breeze.

Steep steps emerged from behind the temple onto a cascade of platforms, each level with several pyres, separate stacks of logs in various states of burning. One sat unlit. I weaved through the watching crowd, all grieving men, to the edge of the platforms, many disapproving eyes on me, many others staring blankly ahead reflecting fire. Two men carried the stretcher down muddy steps and set it awkwardly in shallow water. They threw palmfuls of the Ganga on the sheets and muttered prayers. After carrying it back up to the open pyre, they removed the sheets and there it was, wrapped toe to head in soft, white linen, starkly human. The men, one supporting the shoulders, the other the legs, set it across the logs and stepped away. They said prayers and thrust a torch into the bottom. The kindling took. Smoke wisped up around the body, the fire gradually taking hold to spread out underneath it like a bed.

Before long the fire raged, blazing and crackling, the flames flickering high. The linen blackened, curled and disintegrated. The fire absorbed the form, wrapping legs and arms in flame, surrounding the head completely. Flesh blistered, peeled, flaked off and fluttered away. Organs boiled, liquefied, and ran. As if an illusion, the bones emerged; those of the feet protruded from the pyre, the knobby metatarsals hanging, draped in orange. Eventually, the logs broke and what was left of the body collapsed in on itself, smoke and glowing embers scattering high into the air.

Those fires warmed my skin. Those ashes blew across my face and into my hair. That smoke filled my nostrils, smelling strangely of scented wood. So lucid and real and unfathomably beyond me. Eerily enchanted, I watched them burn. Those people. I stood there drawing even breaths, my pulse in steady rhythm, and watched their bodies turn to ash, their plumes of smoke forming together as a single column and arcing up away from me into the night.

The Playground

Outside in the playground, it's a hot, dry, afternoon. Two boys, age ten, are sitting on the entryway to the slide. They build a fort made out of cardboard boxes. There is the sound of a bomb. HARRY is carrying binoculars and is trying to find where the bomb came from. He has dirty blonde hair and dark brown eyes with a scar under his right eye. BOB is sitting down next to HARRY. His head is down and he's hugging his legs. There's a rip on his pants over the left knee. There are white stains on the boys' clothes. Several white crosses, three feet tall with flowers surrounding them, are standing next to the slide.

BOB. Is it over?

HARRY. Hell no. It's just—

BOB. Mom's calling—

HARRY. *(Harry slaps Bob)* Don't interrupt your commanding officer!

BOB. Please, Harry...

HARRY. General Hartford to you! Drop and give me twenty.

BOB. *(Bob starts shaking)* Yes, sir.

(BOB starts doing push-ups. HARRY takes a canteen filled with water and pours some on his head. The white stains begin to disappear.)

HARRY. I want to hear you, maggot.

BOB. One... two...

HARRY. LOUDER!

BOB. THREE... FOUR...

HARRY. That's enough!

(BOB is slow to get up. He continues to shake a little.)

HARRY. I can feel the enemy near, maggot... I can feel it.

(HARRY continues to look with his binoculars.)

BOB. Where's the rest of the water? I'm telling mom—

HARRY. Maggot, where's your gun?

(HARRY stops using his binoculars and looks down at BOB. BOB is frantically looking for the gun.)

BOB. It's somewhere—

HARRY. For Christ's sakes! What's a man without his gun? Drop and give me twenty!

BOB. But you said—

HARRY. *(slapping BOB)* Drop, maggot. *(Pause.)* Did you forget something Bob?

BOB. One... two... three...

HARRY. *(taking out a map and a red crayon)* Now if we can go through the slide...

BOB. Four... six... ten...

HARRY. Behind that fork-lookin' tree...

BOB. Five...

HARRY. Turn left twenty feet...

BOB. Eleven... fifteen...

HARRY. And then ten feet forward through the mines, we'll make it back to home base.

BOB. Done.

(BOB starts coughing as he wipes his shirt. The sweat is causing some white stains to disappear.)

BOB. Damn paint won't—

HARRY. Ready, maggot?

BOB. *(coughing)* Where's my—

HARRY. Don't need it. Let's go.

BOB. *(coughing louder)* Where are they? Help me look.

HARRY. It's going to get dark soon. Let's go!

BOB. The needle, Harry.

(BOB frantically looks for the syringe as he continues to cough.)

HARRY. It's dark. We won't see the mines.

BOB. I won't even make it to the mines!

(HARRY scoffs. He helps BOB look through military equipment and food supplies. BOB takes two shovels and puts them aside. HARRY finds the medicine, removes the plastic covering, and injects BOB over his knee. Within a few moments, BOB's coughing begins to decrease.)

HARRY. Now that's settled, let's—

(A bomb is heard. It's louder and closer than before. Both boys duck. BOB pulls HARRY's arm.)

BOB. Can we stay for the night, Harry?

HARRY. No.

BOB. But the bombs.

HARRY. (*pointing to the white crosses*) NO! Remember what happened the last time we stayed here!

BOB. This is different. It's just us.

HARRY. No, maggot. We came here for Operation Burial.

BOB. We'll be okay.

HARRY. Operation completed.

BOB. We have enough supplies, this time.

HARRY. We report to home base.

BOB. If we report back, Harry—

HARRY. General Hartford, maggot!

BOB. Sir, yes sir. Permission to speak, sir.

HARRY. Permission not granted.

BOB. You said so yourself...

HARRY. Your commanding officer just ordered you—

BOB. We won't be able to see the mines, Harry!

HARRY. Fine. Get the sleeping bags.

(HARRY and BOB move the cardboard so that they are not seen by the audience. SKY and JAN enter from opposite sides of the stage. Both are in their fifties. JAN enters with groceries. SKY is running toward her.)

SKY. I've been calling and calling, looking all over... let me get that.

JAN. Don't.

SKY. Why do you always—

JAN. Fine.

(JAN drops the groceries on the cement. The bag rips and oranges fall out of the bag.)

SKY. Are you going to...

(JAN sits on the park bench.)

SKY. You're going to just—

JAN. Beer.

(JAN stands but then falls towards the bags. She goes through the groceries for a bottle.)

JAN. Now where is that...

(JAN rips the paper bags and dumps the items on the ground. She picks up the bottle and sits back down on the bench.)

SKY. I don't know why—

JAN. She's pretty?

SKY. What?

JAN. Nice?

SKY. I don't know what—

JAN. Love? Pick up the groceries.

SKY. Don't—

JAN. Don't want to? Fine, leave them.

SKY. *(taking the plastic-covered syringe from his pocket)* We have to go home. We moved here to—

JAN. Can't run away from it.

(JAN gulps the rest of the beer. She throws it to the ground, breaking it.)

JAN. I want another.

SKY. No. Jan. Honey.

JAN. Is that what you called her?

SKY. I don't know what—

JAN. No, Sky, It's not the drugs talking this time. I saw you, the way you looked at... God, I can't even say...

SKY. Honey, let's calm down.

(SKY removes the plastic covering.)

SKY. Now the doctor said—

JAN. Can't you look at me anymore?

SKY. Don't do this, Jan.

(SKY sits next to JAN on the bench. JAN pulls her head back, looking at the sky. He gently lifts her right sleeve. About to inject the needle, JAN pushes his hand, leaving a cut on JAN's arm.)

SKY. Damn it, Jan!

(SKY takes a handkerchief from his pocket and applies pressure on JAN's arm.)

JAN. It doesn't matter—

SKY. We need to go to a hospital... so much blood.

JAN. No.

(A bomb is heard. It's as loud as the previous one.)

SKY. I'm going to get the doctor. You're not—

JAN. Her.

SKY. Let's go.

(SKY pulls JAN's left arm. She won't move.)

SKY. You're bleeding.

(JAN stays stationary.)

SKY. It's over a hundred degrees out... Hon... it's getting dark. Janet Elizabeth Hartford!

(A loud bomb is heard, louder than all the previous bombs. Scared, BOB knocks down the cardboard.)

HARRY. That was uncalled for mag—

BOB. It's hard to sleep—

(SKY grabs hold of JAN.)

SKY. Jan, you're coming home, whether you like it or—

(JAN struggles to free her arm.)

HARRY. Hey!

(HARRY climbs down from the playground and starts approaching the bench.)

HARRY. You can't do that to an unarmed civilian!

SKY. Listen kid, I can't be playin' house with—

(Both SKY and HARRY stare at each other as HARRY touches his scar. SKY laughs.)

SKY. Why if it isn't—

(Panting, BOB runs after HARRY. SKY laughs.)

SKY. Go home. Run to your mom—

HARRY. *(looking at JAN)* Like you ran from us—

SKY. Don't—

HARRY. Why'd you leave—

SKY. I'm not gonna say it again.

BOB. Let's go, Harry.

SKY. Go. Get up, Jan!

HARRY. Don't touch—

(A bomb is heard.)

JAN. It doesn't matter any—

BOB. But the bomb, grandma! The bomb!

SKY. What?

HARRY. Let go of her—

SKY. What bomb?

HARRY. Don't talk like—

(Two consecutive bombs are heard.)

JAN. Yes, the bomb—Robert, come here—

BOB. I'm scared, grandma—

HARRY. We need to find a hiding—

SKY. What bomb!

HARRY. Don't—

SKY. Interrupt me again—

HARRY. No.

SKY. Do as you're—

HARRY. I'm not one of your soldiers—

SKY. I'm your superior—

HARRY. I'm not your wife... you left—

SKY. And I'm back because it's over.

(A bomb is heard.)

HARRY. What are you talking—

BOB. Harry, let's go! Grandma's bleeding—the bombs—

HARRY. Prepare for departure, maggot.

(A bomb is heard.)

HARRY. Tell me you heard that—

SKY. There are no—

HARRY. Why are you pretending—

SKY. We won the war. It's over. I came.

(A bomb is heard.)

JAN. The bomb—

SKY. Doesn't exist!

(SKY attempts to slap JAN, but HARRY grabs SKY's arm in time.)

HARRY. Don't even, grand—

SKY. General Hartford to y—

HARRY. Coward. You left. Your family. The soldiers—

SKY. I was there with them—

HARRY. Our family almost died being starved—

SKY. I fought in that war and won more medals than—

HARRY. Beaten.

SKY. When they wanted to quit—

HARRY. Raped.

SKY. I slapped them in li—

HARRY. Robert can't go a mile without—

SKY. I told you the day I left to take care—

HARRY. Grandma has to take drugs just to—

SKY. And look what you've done—

HARRY. Where were you—

SKY. Cleaning up your goddamn mess—

HARRY. You don't control me! I'm not a soldier... your soldier. You... won't. You were gone and... I was there when grandma was raped! She would hide us in the closet so all I could hear was—she liked it later on. You were gone... and I took over. Led those maggots, killing—I loved it when Baby Joe looked me in the eye—he peed he was so—I did it... me! Not you! You left before it was over... I'm the one who protected the family... I'm the one who killed Baby Joe... I killed my best friends over a canteen!

(HARRY points to the crosses.)

SKY. You think this is a game, boy?

HARRY. Robert wouldn't, the maggot he—

SKY. There's no one buried—

HARRY. We just did it.

(SKY goes to the crosses and starts digging through the sand with his bare hands.)

SKY. I will prove to you... no bombs... there's no...

(From the ground, SKY carries a child in his arms. The child's physical features are unknown due to the large amount of blood and sand covering its body.)

SKY. But we won. They said we won.

HARRY. I had to grandpa. He would've taken—

BOB. Grandma? Grandma!

(JAN's head is on BOB's lap. She's not moving. SKY and HARRY rush to the bench. SKY feels Jan's pulse.)

BOB. Is she—

SKY. Still alive.

HARRY. The hospital.

SKY. *(carrying JAN and looking at her face)* Jan... honey... look at me. Get your map, mag... Harry.

BOB. *(staring into the sky)* It's—

HARRY. Dark, I know. But we'll have to risk it.

(Curtains start closing.)

BOB. No! It's—run!

(Curtains close as a bomb is heard.)

Song

As that she names the hatched ones
biddies, gives them cloth and hay,
as that she provides me with peaks,
or hands, bones folded, something
sculpted, call it boat, house, crane,
as that fact remains and I was born
in the year of the goat, thus bleat
about the fact that she has built
a ceiling by hand, she has visited
shamans from over, under, in front
of, side by side amid that authentic
Siberian snow, with accent come
from sundown, zebra ranch
called home, fence with wheat, fence
wire, as that she knots hats, gives
hats, and wears, as that she opens
the door, as that morn she makes
with ink, yellow where braided, up
to the roof and up, then neck like
swan's, eyes affirmative of the sky.

An Industry of Affection

Potpourri, the import
the erstwhile plants

to break their buds
and blossom

And the domestic

machines, the fluent

melodies and the girl
the crackerjack

in her throat
of no words, hands

fluttering is enough

to convey animation

like a belt like taut
seizure: unfurling:

is love this, is it
so simply conjured

scented, prepared

and boxed to work?

Mood Traveler

The engines, the boxcars passing
The moonlight

We had wine and we had
bread and we had each

other split an apple
or try to with our hands

This is entirely, sufficiently
This is for you

nineteen, cigarette lighter
in hand, wanting that

company of hobos, sleepsters
to share the bread to take

the cup, and looking past local
occupations of gum

snapping or spending
time on a toothpick, pensive

and beneath the stars
that die all the time, you

tumorous you, the wisdom
of the months remaining

the alarm in your eyes, impulse
to move on forward

The whistle, the moving on—
resolve like onyx like pearl too

Maple Shade Twnp.

Lana

I can smell the jet fuel. I can feel in the back of my neck a tautness of flesh, in my hands an arthritic pain. I drag my duffel away. The windows reflect my face and permit me to look at the confusion of traffic, headlamps cutting across the way. I look in my mouth and behold my distaste. Where is he where is he where is he. It is raining and where is he. The puddles. The cabs. The vanished sun. I can still smell the jet fuel. I can still taste the vomit from when I just had to.

Hank

Lana, Lana, Lana. She must have lasted a week at voluntary rehab. If she even went to rehab. So here. Wipers on. Headlamps too. Navigating in the endless deluge when I should be investigating Evesham. Where is she? "Mark," I say. "Keep an eye out." The bastard's sleeping. I flick at his elbow.

"Hm?"

"We're here. Terminal watchamacallit."

"See Lana yet?"

"Howsabout I maneuver us through this water-laden ramp, and you look out for Lana." I don't multitask. Don't ask me to multitask.

Mike rubs his eyes and stifles an extended yawn. Taking his time. Some best friend he is, some partner. "I don't see her," he says. Not like he's making an effort.

"Look carefully." I do the figures. She lasted six days at rehab. Six. And here I am at NWK, picking her up, six days after dropping her off. I don't know what her problem...

Whatever it is. It's waiting among the delinquents or the haggard floating almost supernaturally to the curb. The light, the unremitting bombardment of bluish light, illuminating the tens of stranded forlorn travelers, their backpacks, trolleys, strollers. The rain falls and warps the view. I curse the cheap product. Wipers made-in-China-and-sold-by-Wal-Mart. The silhouettes of passengers melt in the Atlantic-inspired rain, the rain falling, gathering on the windshield. Melting

slowly in the fluorescence. What do people call it when something like silhouettes of people seem to melt, annihilated. But in reality don't melt. *Optical effect. Illusion.*

"Is that her?" I point at a woman in jeans and olive sweater. I think it's her I can spot her a mile maybe two.

Mark

All is pretense. And, sometimes, it works. I close my eyes and the climate desists. There's only darkness. The taste of something vapid. Call it my way of avoiding the issue. Ostrich with its head in the dirt. I've drawn that lesson from experience, the notion that there's safety in ignorance. But then I open my eyes. At which juncture the thousand points of light appear and become invasive, pins needling each nerve in my head. What to do but pretend it doesn't hurt.

What to do but pretend and close my eyes and meditatively recite, "things aren't weird between us." Not like Hank knows anything. I don't think he knows anything—but Lana—I remember—crying on the phone from Vermont at the clinic in Vermont. She was crying and said end it—in a hurry she cried, wanting to end it. She didn't sound like she meant it. We can't end it. We're not ending it. I am locked into the distance. I have a premonition. We're not—

Hank

This state, as if it's built on marshland. Mud slides in a semi-Biblical rain. And where is she. My love. My drink-lovin' love. Doc called and said I had to reach Evesham in one hour. A massacre, he said. Domestic quarrel. Blood like in the movies. But we were already in Newark. So I lied. I'm on my way I said. I'm on the Turnpike.

And I'm here even though I don't like it when the tiny muscles in her face twitter. The way she gets when she gets upset. I don't like it when she ignores me, she ignores my advice. Of how she'll get cirrhosis if she doesn't quit. And not to mention the massive amounts of Demerol she resorts to and who knows what else. Nicotine, too. If she had liver cancer, actually had cancer of the kind that slaughters organs, that kind of killer, she wouldn't even feel the symptoms, would she. She wouldn't feel a thing. Drugged as she is. Mind-numbed as she is.

So I lied to Doc. I'm on the Turnpike I said.

Lana

I know what he'll say. "Couldn't you have flown into Philly?"

The ticket said NWK, definite and non-refundable, but when he asks I won't say a word. I'll take a swig from my cola infused with a splash of airline Jack D. Then he'll smell it on me but he won't mention that he does. And I'll say I'm tired. I just want to go home. Back home to bed and my television with its poor reception, the waves that deform the broadcaster's faces. Whose smiles are fake, anyway. Amusing.

Mark

I get out and offer the front seat to Lana, embracing her pecking her cheek. My way of saying hello. Nothing intended by it—nothing even when I take her coat and bag and dump it in the trunk. She's been here only a minute and how I sense things are different between us—even weird. So I say hello, I slide in the weirdness into the back seat solitary. And hold my breath. Does she like me still does she. Or was I a three-time thing.

"Couldn't you have flown into Philly?" Hank says. Dumb move Hank so stupid of you, and what can you expect but for Lana to respond in that irritated way and straighten up and scratch her head with a huff. Agitation. It is wound into what she says next. "Can we just go home?" Is there a snarl somewhere? Lana tells us how she is airsick, starving, exhausted, how she doesn't want to deal with this now. Stomping her feet and burying her head in her hands, her arms.

No one says a thing. Hank turns his left signal and begins to pull out. He says, "You can sleep in the car. We've got to go to Doc."

"What?"

"A double homicide," I butt in.

"Oh, you gotta be kidding me." She is raising her voice.

I put my hand on her shoulder to reassure her, to calm her down, to say it will be okay. But her body doesn't receive my touch. It takes it but it doesn't receive it doesn't receive. It may as well be ice, her body a sculpture of ice—

Lana

Outside, the Turnpike is a severe magnificence of gray. The car, the hood a flat gray. If the ground were a roadmap we would be gray moving on gray. It extends into the gray horizon and there blends with the sky. And trucks on their way to petroleum depots. And boats to the south shore. It is ugly inside too. It is patronizing and paralyzing and Hank, Hank with his endless regard for duty is making me petulant,

and he wonders why I get so, and Mark is thinking he can patronize me and get what he wants. But I've decided I've decided, the next time we have sex the orgasm I have will be hollow, thin, and meaningless and he will not save me or comfort me and I will tell him so, that he doesn't comfort me and Mark can't replace Hank because Hank can't even replace himself.

I can smell him from here his salt his skin his aftershave and they know of them both. They know.

I wind down the windows and let it rain on my arm.

Trees in grayscale. Wet skunk.

Wheat fields.

Hank

Hard to believe. This land. The mud in it, cheating it. God said here's the land and love's in it but guess what, take the Turnpike and gas fumes too, take she that no one can figure. Lana was once spry and keen, with giggles and a tart wit. Now she languishes. Glum. Hungry. Thirsty. Wanting more sleep. Less me. I don't know. I don't know what her problem is with me. Could be I'm no longer funny could be it's we can't have kids could be wrinkles distorting my face. Could be whatever prompted her to VT in search of young hemp-wearing, marijuana-smoking Green Mountains men, honest to God. Free-range milkers, free-range cows. Fellow dope fiends, hard not to believe. She's mad at me for a thinnish reason. I don't know why. But she's indignant, all fired high up.

She wasn't always that she wasn't she didn't wear her hair like that. Her step had spring. She cowered less. And don't the pictures relate how her eyes had that quick sparkle that trademark sparkle the wink-wink without a need to blink? Smile I know I must have a smile on my face now. Stupid silly nostalgia. There's no way to reclaim it. Is there? It's been done. Here's no to reclaiming it. I look over at her: not a sign of affection in the way she sits where she sits staring out at the land. And blue. It has turned blue. The sky. It has turned blue and the rain is not raining. And the land, the red dirt land, the dark brown dirt and open fields. It's almost enough to forgive the state its rainy trespass.

I reach out to touch her arm. She shrinks away. I realize we haven't made eye contact in six days, I realize her cola reeks of whiskey, I realize God's funny even if I'm not.

Lana says she wants to go home. She says so with hostility, fear, a hatred borne by what she wants most. But I don't know what that even means. What home means.

Mark

A dirt road. Hank says we're taking it down to the house Doc says he's at. The branches make patterns against the sky.

Strawberry bushes. Sunlit.

We go

Lana

under vibrant leaves like starfish. It hasn't rained here it hasn't stormed a bit. I can hear the promise of crickets. I can see the animals, the horses in the distance, sheep bleating. A stray dog skittering in the tall grass. I guess it's okay we skipped home for this. We missed that exit for this where there is no home barnyard maple but there is this

Hank

Evesham, Burlington County. A turkey staring at us, its gullet pumping. A cat on the porch, cleaning its paw. The rocking chair it sits on gently going back and forth. "Smell the Halloween fires in the air?" I spin the wheel to make a hairpin turn. Smells like Halloween and wood burning and warmth and further in the year, respite and gift wrappers and pine. Roasted chestnuts, sweet apple cider. But there I go being sentimental.

"The corpses would be there," I say.

The Buick is parked halfway off the road and onto green turf. The yellow police tape cordons the area.

"Evesham, Burlington County," I say. "Smell that air."

I put the car in park and look over at Lana. She has her arm partially out of the window, closing her hand into a fist and then opening it, spreading it wide. Repeating the movement like a pulse. Mark says something to me but I don't hear. I ask Lana, "You okay?"

Smell that air.

Lana

In my hands, an arthritic pain. I sip my cola. I let my hand expand and contract. Doc's Buick is unsafely parked, half of it out on the driveway. Hank says to smell the air and I smell it and for now I forget

my airsickness and that stench, the jet fumes, but I'm not completely okay and my heart still aches for fullness, some feeling of regard that I am complete and my hands are getting a little better and maybe it's the whiskey and I'm willing to say it may not be.

"You okay?" Hank asks. He's been watching me.

"Go do your job," I say and let me sulk here.

Mark

"Same old, same old?" I ask, reaching for my notebook. Looks like there may not be eyewitnesses—but there're people on the scene who wouldn't be on the scene unless they were witnesses of some kind. Neighbors, a kid playing in his sandbox. They must have heard the gunfire. And Lana in all this, sitting in the passenger seat—as if an invalid—talking in whispers to Hank. She wouldn't tell him about us. She wouldn't, would she.

The cat sniffs the sunlight I see.

It feels good to be on foot on firm ground—but what if Hank were to find out about Lana and me. It's tugging at my center like a pestilence.

Doc is urging me over. He says, "Hurry, before the blood discolors and disintegrates and I die of old age." Is that impatience, is he mad. Or is he just trying to be funny. He has his hands on his hips.

What he's trying to be doesn't matter right now, though. The spots in the house where the bodies were found are dirtied with blood. Why haven't the corpses already been taken in for the inquest. Were they waiting for us, for us to arrive.

"One hour wouldn't have made a difference," Doc says and he's probably right.

Bullet wounds, .38 caliber, three shots. Simple rage on the husband's part. So says consensus, which has been right usually. So I believe it as I stare out at Lana and Hank. She is in the car and he is by the car and they are talking in low murmurs. Rage on the husband's part. I believe it. It seems right.

Doc says, "Talk to the boy. He heard everything." So I do and take notes. Question is: where is the husband?

Lana

The dead. "Check on the dead." It's just my hand. Old arthritic pain. He is feeling the bones of it now, the flesh. "They're waiting," I

say. It's almost awkward almost strange to have him close like this, like he used to. Be so close. It's just a pain. "It's just arthritis."

"You should get it checked. Did you get it checked?"

"I've had priorities."

"Hank," Doc mutters from the back of the house.

"I'll be there in a second."

"Go," I say.

"If you're taking Demerol—"

"I stopped." And yes that explains the pain, why I can feel it like a sunrise although the emptiness the soreness I feel has always been there, Demerol or not.

"You stopped."

I got scared. Cirrhosis. When he brought me those diagrams and struck the cirrhosis like God in me, the fear of hell compressed was left deep in my liver to burn it. From the dark inside. "I ran out of pills. I didn't get more." They've been there too long for him to keep them waiting more. "I stopped," I say, and pull away. "Now go."

Mark

Does anyone know the husband and where is he?

Hank

Is what she's saying the truth? Because it's good. A right step. "Doc," I say. "Sorry we're late."

"An hour," he says. "Didn't know it meant two." A drawl of patience. "Traffic. Two was about right."

I crouch down and uncover the bodies to see the faces the shock the fear. And a glint of forgiveness in their eyes. It's really that, isn't it. Final influence. The look in one's eye that says the debts are paid, that there's no ill feeling past the final gleam of something dazzling going across the irises, that the final icy expression arises to nothing more than one's final good act on earth.

She was pretty. She had pretty eyes.

And now dark red boot prints have created circles around the two bodies. And now they rest easy. I look around as the sun sets and rearranges the room with the reflections of everything shiny shifting a little and putting everything in slow flux. The dead man has his hand over the dead woman's hand. I suppose that constitutes a good act. "Depressing sight," I say, nevertheless. "Don't you think?" I stand up and stretch my back, having been cooped in a car too long.

Mark

Trail receding into the distance. The air rich with loam. If you can call it loam. If you can enjoy the air. Given the context. The trail. From the starting point to over there. From the itsby bitsy spider went up the water spout—to the down came the rain and washed the spider out—to the so on and so on and so on until sun sang and sunlight too—and then quiet, and then disquiet, and then the trail—prints of boots, blood-laced, going out into the deep.

He killed himself. I know he did. In the water he killed himself. Call it intuition. And now I'm glad I wore my boots as I trudge through the soft dirt.

Lana

Mark with that look in his eyes again like he's forgotten the past. He goes off wandering like that he might get shot. A criminal in the bush discharging a pistol on him. I hope he's armed. I tip my cola and watch it trickle on the dirt drip drip drip. Drip drip drip. Until it is empty and I hurl it into the weeds. So arrest me officer. I littered. At least take me home. Where I know there's plenty to do, so much of importance to do. Home. There's bed, there's what we do in bed, there's shade. I miss the barnyard the barn house the maple and why did I do what I did.

It didn't help that Hank was at work and Mark was "at work." It didn't help the television was on but I wasn't watching the crap that was on. The collision of our bodies, making me feel young or different, I can't know for certain which. And it could've stopped there, but Hank, taking his frustrations doing whatever he did, going to the bowling alley or the pool hall as a big-tipping regular. So it's his fault, not mine. Either that or I'm a sinful slut whore.

Mark

People. What people can do. People with a weapon, doesn't always have to be a .38. Put in a little love and a little desire, and wham. Suddenly they're potent enough to hurt a permanent lot. There's the blown skull in the stream, water rippling around it like guts. Tiny bubbles effervescent, and even though it's October I'm reminded of spring. There's the husband, folks. Brains eaten up but we can't blame the fish or what birds come down low to test the meat. Love is bait resulting in fresh fish feed. Not pretty not happy.

He sidles beside me. "God," he says.

"Wasn't exactly on his side," I say I smell that air. Hank was right when he said smell that air. It's air made voluminous by clarity, the scent of it. I'm clearheaded. I haven't been this way in a while.

Hank

"Case closed, you think?" I say, watching the water lap up the remaining bits of brain.

"I'd say," he says, and spits.

I wonder if he knows that I know or if he thinks that I know. I wonder if it changes the kind of person he is, if the kind of person he is has got to do with whether he knows that I know or thinks that I know.

The water laps up the brain. "Poor bastard."

I don't know that there's been justice, that he got what he deserved. Once there's a chance to reflect on it, maybe I'll know. It's a large "maybe," but then again, these are large questions. All muddled and dirtied, these are stains on an otherwise pure slate. Questions such as, would I have done the same?

Mark

"I'd say." I don't even want to think about it much. An odorous, decrepit taste in my mouth. So I spit. That's me with my brains spilling. Old me. Or that's me in the house somewhere carried off by now to inquest.

For him to say it's closed, like eyes are closed, it sounds like he just wants to go home. And I like the idea of closing the case, so I can take time and find a way of making sense of this a little. He wants it closed for a reason I can't have.

"Poor bastard," I say.

Hank

So I don't know for sure. But I'm thinking what brought us to this land is what brought the bullet to that man's brain. In a long-winded circuitous kind of way. Either he couldn't find it inside of him to forgive the world outside of him, or he couldn't establish a home of peace at his center, where it matters.

I contact the team to come over and check this out. I crouch down and dip my fingers in the cool water. It's hard to pretend it isn't

shocking. I turn to him.

"You okay?" I ask. Mark's gone into coma, standing with his eyes closed and no sign that he's in the same county I'm in.

And then his eyelids quake, and then they flash open. "Poor bastard," he says. He walks away from the water, rubbing his neck as if straightening a crick in it. "They'll take it from here." So I follow him back to the house.

Mark

New me is swum in blood bloody baptism. Hank's got some right in this religion renewal thing. Maybe. And after this we will pack up the bodies and pack up the equipment and leave the place, with the sun in the deep west, with reports due the following day. And what's the point of all of it. Where's the feeling. The guilt, the fear. Just a kind of empty sadness at the mess of corpse flesh. Believe it.

It's enough to turn a man sour.

"Hank," I want to say. "Tell me about religion."

Lana

It's a brisk chill, the temperature falling quickly. I think I'm coming down with something and my body's not good for right now. Those germ-laden airplane seats, the bacteria in my blood. And suddenly it's as if I've got a thousand toxins in me, as if my body is a conduit for the disposal of poisonous substances in the world about. I'll accept the misery and forgive whoever or whatever caused it, as long as I get the effect of Demerol from all the accepting. I'm ugly and dirty, so much so that I can feel the grime in the tips of my fingers. Will Hank please forgive me. And I realize it's my ugliness I'm suffering from. The dirt that can't be scrubbed from me. No bathwater or soap could do it.

My want for cleanliness isn't urging me this time to slit my veins to drain my body. I suppose that's good. I suppose that's healthy. If nothing else is. And while I stand here, content, I know I'll want it so that we'll go, we'll drop him off, we'll head directly to Maple Shade, to the barn house, the bed, the television set with the poor reception, and maybe a drop a little drop of whiskey in my coffee. And I'll forget the ugliness and sip the coffee. He'll let me. He always does, doesn't he. I'll see the sign, the welcome sign that says welcome to Maple Shade, and I know Hank'll let me.

Falls of the Ohio

A tugboat pulls a barge hauling
coal and timber. High mud
water splits. The river's locks
empty and fill, glints
in the current. Downstream,
the falls of the Ohio expose the patch
reef of clams and sponges, golden
rods and stinging nettles wilt. My arm
shudders and I inhale the humid air, suffering
from the altitude of this bridge;
flipped a coin into the Ohio
where Cassius Clay threw his medal.

No Name Woman, Revisited

"I almost bought a van at the Salvation Army today," he said. He said it off-handedly, sliding into his seat at the table as the words flowed out, but with definite intent: He said it to her. He said it to get a response, to start some kind of interaction between them that might, he hoped, make the rest of the night easier. He'd said the same thing earlier in the day to his friend over the phone, and when he did his friend had laughed. A real laugh. But with her it was different. Not different because she wasn't his friend, but because she was more than a friend—and she had been for over a year now. But even so she didn't laugh.

Instead, she made a slight, soft sound, barely audible but close to a sigh. Head bowed down, she stuck her fork absent-mindedly into the dinner in front of her, and the table beneath her plate—the table set between the two of them—moved with a force neither he nor she quite expected but which took neither by complete surprise, either.

"Damn table," she said, her tone indicating that she had no particular listener, no warranted response in mind. Though they were her first words since she sat down to eat, they didn't fool him into thinking his attempt to open her up had worked.

"Yeah, so, oddly enough, I was looking at a new one of these today," he labored on, tapping the blunt end of his knife against the card-table top. "I mean, we've been living here for a few months. We might as well have a functional one," he added, taking his first bite.

Again, only that same soft, slight sound.

He hated that she used the excuse of eating to avoid conversation. They'd done worse things to each other than talk with food in their mouths. Taking another bite, he continued on with his story:

"Anyway, so when I was out on my break I saw one, saw this other table, right? It was set up in the store window, you could see the thing from the street—God, that place is always so dark it's no wonder they don't bother doing better displays—but I went in or whatever to check it out. I'm pretty sure the guy at the register recognized me—I mean, how could he not, I'm in there probably once a week just to see the funny people they got working there—but so he's watching me as

I walk in, like I'm gonna steal from the Salvation Army or something. Seriously. So he finally gets over himself and I walk over towards the window, and this table: You should have seen it. Hardwood top, sturdy legs. A couple scratches, sure, but nothing a little polish can't cover up. And I thought about this piece of shit we've got," he pointed again to the table between them, "and figured I might as well buy the thing."

He paused to take another bite. She stared at her plate, moving the food around a bit with her fork. She still didn't say anything.

Then he started again: "So then I asked this other worker guy who's zooming around in his chair how much it cost—I mean, I guess I could've found the tag, but it's more fun to get them talking—and he's mumbling who-the-hell-knows-what and finally gets around to saying it was \$500. Five hundred fuckin' bucks. Can you believe it?"

She was getting tired of the tag questions, of the empty attempts to get her to respond. Feeling a pressing weight in that small space between the eyes, she lifted her head up and stared straight into his face. A stone-dead stare she knew would get to him enough to silence him entirely, or at least force the story to a quick conclusion.

She was right. As soon as she offered him her eyes, a form of the contact he'd so long been asking for, he dropped them. Looking instead at the table, he cleared his throat uncomfortably and tried to carry on. But this time he spoke with a haste that wasn't there before. "This one we've got now isn't so bad, I guess," he said. "Not about to spend that much to replace it. So anyway, after giving up on that table in the window, I noticed this sign for a Ford Aerostar, said they had it parked out back, ready for sale. Three hundred they wanted for it. I thought it was funny, you know, a van costing less than a kitchen table. So I almost bought it. Impulse. But then I figured I'd get buyer's remorse."

Again, she granted no reply, just turned her head away from his to face the window above the sink. She watched as the first few drops of a night rain began to fall and trickle slowly down the glass. For the rest of the meal, the light hum made by the rain outside was the only sound to pass between them.

* * *

She ran one finger through the warm stream of water pouring out from the faucet. Back and forth she moved her hand, waiting for the sink to fill, feeling the slight pressure against her skin that the run-

ning water made. Mounds of bubbles began to build as the water kept filling. She played with them a bit, too, shaping mountains and valleys out of their billowing wealth. When she tired of these distractions, she turned the faucet off and began to wash the dishes. They had a dishwasher, but since it was just the two of them there was never enough to make hand-washing any kind of a hassle. Besides, a part of her liked the peace she felt standing alone at that sink; and she got a kind of satisfaction from scrubbing the plates clean, from feeling the rough turn smooth again.

Sensing the stillness around her, she looked out the window and noticed that the rain had stopped. A white light, almost eerie in its incandescence, shone in the glass, a radiated reflection of the single bulb hanging above her. Below the reflected light stood a woman. Two eyes stared back at her emptily; two eyes in a face, atop a body that she could barely recognize. Like an apparition, their shape was all form, no substance. Distinct from and yet somehow a part of the hazy fog that had replaced the falling rain outside.

Who was this woman in front of her? she wondered.

She remembered something she had read one time, some theory—Lacan's, was it?—about the reflected self. Apparently, when she was a baby, the sight of herself in the mirror had scared her the first time she saw it. Looking back at her from the shiny glass was this thing—she didn't know quite what—and it bothered her precisely because she couldn't identify it. Here she was, an infant full of so many sensations; at once hungry, tired, and confused. These emotions pulled her in all different directions, split her into pieces to make her feel apart, fragmented. But what she saw on the outside was different: It wasn't at all what she felt inside. What she saw was something all tied together, something whole, something unified. This world of difference between what she felt and saw—this gap—was, is, desire.

Looking again at her reflection in the window, she wondered what her desires were now, some twenty-three years past that first glance in the mirror. They should be different. She was no longer a helpless child. She was an adult, a grownup, an individual who should be past the immature bowings to animal instinct. For wasn't it those very instincts, wasn't it her surrender to them, wasn't that what got her into this mess to begin with? Passion, greed, desire—emotions so strong they overtook you entirely, swallowed your senses with a senselessness of their own. She figured they'd overtaken him since they moved in

together, too; she'd seen the way he'd avoid looking her in the eyes, heard the way his voice would falter on the phone at times, nervous to tell her he had to work late *so she might as well not wait up*. Deep down, she knew her suspicions were true. But did that somehow make what she'd done better? Make it any less shameful?

In the other room, he brought his knees to the ground, kneeling down to face the edge of the table top at eye level. He'd found a screwdriver in the garage after dinner. It was really just that one table leg that was the problem. If he could just tighten it back up it wouldn't wobble so much. He was sure he could fix it, that they could hold onto it and make it work for at least a bit longer.

Back in the kitchen she had started to return the towel-dried dishes to the cupboards above the counter. She always made sure they were really dry—if they were even just a little wet, especially on the bottom, they'd stick together when stacked. The plastic cups were the worst for that.

She caught her reflection once again in the window when she went back to drain the sink. This other woman was at once her and not her, both foreign and yet entirely familiar. It was like she could see right through her. She wondered if that's what it was like when he looked at her, if he could see through her, if he could see inside. She put her hand on her stomach. She wasn't showing yet. Lifting up her shirt, she traced her forefinger across her skin, gently circling the belly button and wondering if what now grew inside was still small enough to fit in that hole. *How could she ever tell him?* she wondered. *How could he ever understand something that even she herself could not?*

"Hey, can you come in here and help me for a sec?" At the sound of his voice she quickly pulled her shirt back down. "If I'd been born with three hands I'd do it myself," he added from the other room. "But if somehow that was ever true, the doctors removed it long ago. I just need you to hold this damn leg in place while I try to tighten it back on straight." His voice trailed off a bit at the end, or maybe a part of her stopped listening. In any case, she tossed the towel onto the counter, pulled the blinds down over the window, and walked into the next room.

* * *

Outside the air felt heavy. Humidity did that—weighed you

down and enveloped you like a thick towel. But instead of drying you off like a towel, it seemed to do the opposite; it was like osmosis, a cosmic-corporeal exchange, the heavy damp high in the air always transferring back down to you, dampening your own skin. He wiped his forehead as he walked. It had stopped raining a few hours ago—right after they'd finished eating, he thought—but the rain had given way to a thick fog that promised of another coming shower.

He'd always enjoyed going for night walks. When he was younger, his father had taken him along often. It was their special tradition. Most boys played catch in the backyard with their dads or helped inspect that space under the hood of the family car. But his father had been busy—he'd worked long days and usually weekends, too—so they spent their limited time together in the quiet solace of night. At these times they rarely needed to say much of anything to each other; they would just walk, sometimes the young boy following right behind, sometimes side-by-side, sometimes hand-in-hand.

Tonight he walked alone. After he'd fixed the table (or they'd fixed it, actually—she had come in to help him eventually) they'd left it alone, moving into the bedroom to watch the news. Once he'd realized she was more focused on the flashing screen than him, he'd decided to steal outside for fresh air.

It was nearing the end of fall. Even in the dark he could see the piles of leaves collected along the sidewalk by the wind. Normally he would order his steps according to these piles, seeking the sound made by shoe upon dry leaves, that hard, stiff crunch. But the rain from earlier in the evening had ruined his fun; it had flattened the piles before he could, turning the leaves into a brown, mushy mess.

He knew he'd made his share of mistakes. He knew by her silence that she knew, too. At that moment a part of him wished for his father; he wanted a chance to feel at peace in the quiet. Right now, he had no peace with himself or her, for even the silence was filled with endless questions. He was tired of hiding, of keeping in the dark what needed to come to light. But tired as he was, he was even more afraid of revealing himself in the open, of coming clean. Admitting what he'd done meant really acknowledging the wrong—to both her and himself.

It was a small backstreet, so most of the lights were long burnt out and forgotten. The full, round, skim-milk moon shone from above; the brightness it cast doubled as it reflected off the wet pavement. He

tried to catch his shadow, but the more he chased the further it ran, evading capture in the safety of the wet, slippery ground.

His thoughts began to run in all directions, too. He wondered how long that table would stay straight, would remain solid. A few weeks, a month? Laughing a bit to himself, he pictured it: This Thanksgiving maybe, the china set—not those plastic plates they used most days—her steady hand carrying that large roasted centerpiece from oven to table top, the table legs tragically collapsing in on themselves, overburdened by the weight of the feast. It would doubtless be another mess.

* * *

In the morning, the sunlight streaming in through the slight cracks in the blinds woke him. It was the weekend. He liked the luxury of waking up naturally. Still supine, he squinted into the refracted streams of daylight stretching out from the window, his sleepy self getting lost in the tumbling inertia of the dust particles moving steadily through the tunnels of bright light. He yawned and turned to face her. The space next to him in bed was empty. Seeing this, his wide-open mouth closed and dropped into a slight frown, his eyebrows furrowing just a bit. He reached his hand across to smooth out the bare sheet; the slight dents on the bed, the only markers of her once-present body, still felt warm.

Kneeling in front of the toilet, she could feel the grout between the tiles on the floor digging into the skin of her knees. If she'd had time, she would have laid a towel down to cushion herself from the cold, hard, variegated surface of the bathroom floor. As it was, she'd made it just in time: There'd be no mess to clean up this morning—just a flip of the small metal lever and it would all flush away. At the churn of her stomach (it was becoming a familiar sensation), she had immediately known what was coming and slipped quickly out of bed. Now she took a deep breath, hoping the feeling had passed entirely, and pushed herself up with both hands.

The sound of rushing water coming from the bathroom next door made him turn back to his side of the bed. In a few moments he heard the door creep open, and she climbed back in bed next to him. He thought about pretending to still be asleep, but sensing her restlessness he decided to wake up.

"Morning," he said, turning to face her. She rolled on her back and quietly returned the greeting to the ceiling above.

"Want me to start some breakfast?" he asked. He reached his hand under the sheet to feel the bare skin of her belly and gave it a light pat.

She pulled the sheets up closer to her chin, tucking her elbows into her body to displace his hand and feel closer to herself, to feel more whole. "Sure," she said. And as she watched him get up, as her eyes followed his shuffling steps out of the room, she felt it again, that unmistakable churning sensation from deep down within, forcing her to get back up, to empty out what was making her sick inside.

The Unexamined Life

The smell of pizza and pot still lingers in the living room from the night before. Two grunts of affirmation escape from the mess of couches, easy chairs, and TVs that clutter our “living” area. They come from my roommates, one of whom is curled up in the couch under his blanket playing *Tiger Woods 2005* on the Xbox, the other sitting in one of our many lounge chairs hastily attempting to finish the reading he had planned to do last night—before he got distracted.

My five step hike to the kitchen provides me with my morning essentials: milk, Frosted Flakes, orange juice, and four Advil to cure my aching head. I sit down on the couch to watch a couple of holes while I eat my breakfast. With my breakfast done and my roommate no closer to beating Tiger, I return to my room with the intention of sitting down to write. I must retell the story of the hike that did not change my life. I survey my four walls for inspiration, but Ansel Adams’ black and white image of El Capitan that sits above my desk only reminds me of what didn’t happen on my summer adventure. I’m not a nature photographer or environmental rights activist. I’m a college student who lives in the suburbs, goes to class, works as a restaurant host, and throws recyclables away in normal trash cans. Struggling to write about the bears that didn’t chase me, I look at my computer clock, reminded of how little has changed. I’m late for class; I brush my teeth, throw on some clean clothes and rush out the door.

The next morning will be more of the same. This is the monotony I have chosen, at least for now. I am not a naturalist or a wilderness adventurer. But I like my comfortable life. I get to hang out with my best friends every day of the week, party on the weekends, and be a twenty-year-old college student, young enough and lucky enough to be my own boss and enjoy near-freedom from responsibility. Only when I step out of my day-to-day routine and attempt to recall those experiences that deviate from my norm do I know there’s something missing.

The John Muir Trail, winding its way whimsically through the Sierras much as its namesake had done a century ago, is almost as un-

familiar to me as the moon. Growing up in the suburbs of Los Angeles, the closest I got to nature on any sort of a regular basis was summers at the beach, sunscreen, sandy toes and uninterrupted miles of half-naked vacationers. Anything but a peaceful experience removed from civilization. Interrupting this sunburned mass of suburban leisure were family trips to Vermont. My summers were punctuated by a month of hiking and swimming in the infinite sea of green that bordered my Grandma's New England property. Now, as a twenty-year-old with a job, a girlfriend, and a dilapidated rental house to maintain, those summers in Vermont and my current environment belonged to two different worlds.

The voicemail was unexpected. Hearing, "Hey man, lets meet up at my place in Mammoth and go backpacking for a few days," was different than the usual, "Hey do you want to go get dinner and see a movie?" or, "Hey dude, the keg is at my place tonight." I wasn't thrilled about the prospect—everything I wanted was already a part of my summer routine. Mammoth offered me an unknown environment that my summer of lounging, beer drinking and fast-food eating had undoubtedly made me unprepared for. I was curious. Partly to relive childhood memories and partly to prove to myself that a couple of nights in the woods wouldn't kill me, I decided to leave my suburban bubble behind. With my memories of Vermont quickly traveling to the front of my brain and my right foot itching to put miles behind me, I hopped in my Honda and drove to Mammoth.

* * *

Hiking should not be this fucking hard; at least Eli hadn't suggested it would be. The first mile had been all uphill, but the grade wasn't steep, and it had really been less than a mile. Every step I took, I found myself sucking in air and attempting to prove to my backpacking companion, and myself, that I wasn't as tragically out of shape as I was quickly discovering. The scenery from that first stretch is etched in my mind, but it consisted mostly of dusty brown rocks of varying sizes and two omnipresent gray Reeboks.

After about 25 minutes, the ground beneath me began to level out, and the scenery finally changed. I looked up; the Reeboks and rocks gave way to a dark blue orb that trailed off into a thick mass of green. The crisp breeze that ruffled my hair made the entire landscape,

from water to grass to trees, sway with life. It was as if nature took a deep breath and said *OK, let's let this city kid in... at least for a little while*. I called out to Eli and told him I needed to stop. I walked over to the water's edge and slid my hand into the mass of blue in front of me. The cold shocked me back to reality. The sun beating down on my neck had little effect on the lake water in front of me, fed by the mountains that appeared to grow out of the clusters of lodgepole pines that surrounded the lake. Much of the snow that had at one point covered those mountains had found its way into this lake and managed to elicit a *Damn, that's cold!* response from my startled brain.

Despite a frozen hand and empty lungs, I began to enjoy my mountain sojourn. This wasn't suburbia but it wasn't Vermont either. Vermont was tiny ponds, rolling hills, and pleasant, inviting green around every bend in the road. This was less inviting, more daunting and felt incomparably larger than my Grandma's rural property. Vermont was also my parents, my little brother, walks to the ice cream stand and Grandma's warm French toast covered in Vermont maple syrup.

As I began to salivate, Eli tossed me a bag of trail mix. *Stale peanuts and purified lake water, nope this is definitely not Vermont*. Eli pulled out a map of the area we were hiking, attempting to acquaint me with my surroundings. To get to the trailhead, we had driven about 20 miles and were no longer in Mammoth, but just outside of the nearby town known ambiguously as Tom's Place. We left from the Mosquito Flats campground and were hiking in the John Muir wilderness. The lake that had nearly frozen my hand off was known as Long Lake, and, to my dismay, was actually less than a mile from Mosquito Flats. Eli showed me that we would pass at least three more lakes before reaching our proposed destination for the night, Chickenfoot Lake, about six miles into the hike. Eli also showed me a few more possible stopping points, specifically Upper Morgan or Lower Morgan Lake, which were about eight and nine miles away, respectively. I immediately and vehemently shook my head to these propositions, wondering whether I would even be able to make it to Chickenfoot Lake, with the 30 pounds I was carrying on my back and the feebleness I had already exhibited less than a mile into our hike.

Clearly sensing my desperation, Eli assured me that the entire hike wouldn't be this hard. He'd already been in Mammoth for a few days before I arrived, having ample time to adjust to the altitude.

His house was at around 8,000 feet and we were currently climbing between nine and eleven. I, by contrast, had come from nearly sea-level almost instantaneously into this atmosphere. He encouraged me to keep drinking water in order to stave off altitude sickness. *Great, another thing to add to my already long list of concerns.* To keep my mind off a possible pounding headache and the prospect of puking all night, I distracted myself with my surroundings.

The path we traveled was characterized not so much by the green that surrounded us but instead by the lack of it. The lodgepole pines in the area are massive, timeless creatures; they must be in order to withstand winter in the Eastern Sierra. I felt unworthy to share their home. Standing next to one and letting my hands graze slowly over its rough skin, I knew my youth and my ignorance. Every knot in the bark and sway of a branch spoke volumes without saying a word. I sat down on the smooth forest floor and ran my fingers through the cool dirt shaded by my silent mentor. Cross-legged, I watched it extend its spindly arms towards me. It was imparting wisdom onto this naïve kid, just as my grandfather had done so many summers ago in Vermont. The beams of light that shone through these arms warmed my skin, taught me, comforted me, and formally invited me into this ancient abode.

As calming as these pines are, there are not nearly enough of them to hide the reality that the Sierra Nevadas are not normally welcome hosts. One glance up and away from the gentle ripples of the lakes or the soothing sway of the light green meadows serves as a reminder that the green is only temporary. The mountains, still covered in light patches of snow and standing like light purple sentinels against this summer backdrop, are the permanent inhabitants of the Sierras. They were nice enough to let us in without first making us walk through eight feet of snow and endure below freezing temperatures.

To eyes accustomed to track homes and pavement, these mountains and all that belonged to them had mysterious powers. Each step, and then hour, melted into the scenery. Each rock, tree, bush, fallen log, meadow, and lake imprinted itself in my brain before being unapologetically replaced by the next. *We're here.* A small blue orb extended into three smaller prongs, bordered on the right by a sloping hill dotted with lodgepole pines, and on the left by a flat grassy area. Chickenfoot Lake. Our proposed destination for the night. I laid my pack down by the water's edge and laid my body down in the meadow to the left. The breeze ran through the grass around me and I closed my eyes. When I

opened them, the mountains were still there as if to say, *You're welcome*. Hiking, backpacking, reconnecting with an old friend, this was what I was supposed to be doing. Earlier that day, I had been sitting in a car at a campsite near the trailhead surrounded by families, tents, RVs and the general hum of the suburbs on vacation. Now the only noise I heard was the gentle rippling of the lake that was to be our neighbor for the coming night.

Understanding my attitude transformation and also itching to continue hiking, Eli asked me if I wanted to keep going. The sun was still high enough in the sky. We had at least another couple of hours to make it to one of the two Morgan lakes before night. My lungs no longer cursed me after every step. *C'mon Jon, don't puss out on me now*. That was all the motivation I needed. I pulled my body out of its grassy resting place and set out to finish my hike.

The last two miles made the first six feel like a barefoot stroll along a trail of satin pillows. The first mile after Chickenfoot was an unbroken, steep grade consisting of at least a dozen long switchbacks. Gray Reeboks and dusty brown stones had once again become the dominant feature of the scenery, and my lungs felt as if they were punching me in the chest, seeking revenge for tricking them into continuing this adventure that they had been sorely unprepared for. I no longer wanted the green of the meadow or the cool dirt in the shadow of a lodgepole. I wanted the intoxicating green of a freshly packed bowl or the cool wetness of a beer in my hand. My couch was now much more inviting than this mountain, and something that I was also much better physically prepared for. Too late to turn around; I cursed my gut, toned by two years of college food and parties, and continued, one gray shoe at a time.

It took me a few moments to realize that I was no longer placing each step significantly above the one before it. Eli and I stopped and simultaneously turned around to measure how far we'd come. You could see everything. The green valley, the small blue pearl below us that once had been Chickenfoot Lake, and the tiny path that I had cursed every step of the way up all lay before us. We were a part of the mountains, and they were letting us see their view. The mountain that I stood next to cascaded down into the green valley below as if it was a wave of rock about to swallow all that we had just traveled. I knelt down in the sharp ground at my feet. My hands sifted through the hot sand, nothing at this level could protect it from the sun that now

pat my back, congratulating me on my feat. I picked up a rock in my hand, allowing it to twist its way through my fingers before I chucked it down into the valley. It tumbled harmlessly down the mountain in a fraction of the time it had taken me to climb up. It came to rest in the shade of one of my old, wise friends.

All I'd done was essentially walk up a steep hill, but I felt like I'd accomplished more in that hour than I'd accomplished in all of my academic successes. No good grade, epic snowboarding day, or college acceptance could compare to this.

Dinner eaten, the tent set up, the sun setting and Eli off to inexplicably take a dip in the freezing water of our camping companion, I was left to my own devices. The earth around Lower Morgan Lake differed from every other environment we'd experienced that day. The lake was high. At Chickenfoot we looked up at the mountains. Now we were a part of them, as if we were in a bowl surrounded by walls of rock. If our high altitude was ever in doubt, the patches of snow that were eye level with me across the lake proved it. Despite these austere surroundings, the banks of the lake were greener than any area we'd passed earlier. A thick blanket of grass crept to the water's edge before being abruptly cut off by the darkening blue mass.

We had set up camp in the middle of a grove of trees. The setting was unique; there stood the most trees we'd seen in any one place all day. From a fallen log next to our tent, I could see the lodgepoles become silhouettes and disappear with the setting sun. Our campsite, our home for the night, was beautiful, but as I waited for Eli to come back, I felt a weighty uneasiness begin to creep over me.

After he returned, we spent a satisfied few minutes reminiscing about our day as wilderness adventurers. Soon, however, a frustrating restlessness set in as we struggled to find something, anything, to do. It was only seven at night; we were tired after the long day's hike, but not tired enough to simply fall asleep. With nothing more to talk about, and the single, mind-consuming task of hiking behind me, I realized how out of place I felt. I wasn't an outdoorsman or an adventurer, and the mountains and I had both finally figured it out.

Eli remembered that he brought his iPod, and we spent the next half an hour in the dark tent listening to Dane Cook, using our laughter to forget how pathetic our current situation was. I'd come all this way to escape from technology, and here I was in the middle of the woods, most likely miles away from any other humans, and I was

making desperate use of the one remnant of civilization I had left in my possession.

After the CD ended, Eli shut off the iPod and went to bed. Left to my own devices, the slight uneasiness I'd felt earlier became an all-consuming fear. *What the hell was I doing here?* I looked outside of the tent, but all I could see was pitch black. Unanswerable questions started tormenting me. *What am I going to do when I graduate?* The cold wind coming off the lake cut right through my sleeping bag. *Will my relationship with my family ever be the same now that I've moved to school?* The only noises I heard were the steady breath of my backpacking companion and the soft ripples of the wind stirring the lake water nearby. *Where is my home? Do I even have a home?* This complete absence of diversion was forcing me to think about myself, and more frighteningly, everything outside of myself that I couldn't control. *What am I getting out of life in the first place? Am I wasting my time? How much time do I even have left?* Instead of letting the television or the conversation of my friends distract me, I was forced to listen to nature, and all that it could offer me was my own questions.

Nature is a scary place because it brings one simultaneously closer to both life and death than living with the constant distractions of modern technology ever could. The natural world connects me to the purest and simplest meaning in my life. Nature gives me an intimate connection with who I am or, in the case of this trip, who I'm not. This closeness with pure life also creates many of these unanswerable questions and brings me into contact with the very real inevitability of death. I have been conditioned to distract myself, but that night next to Lower Morgan Lake I was left with absolutely no distractions at my disposal. The missing piece that nature provides is the realization of how very alive we are in this specific moment. Yet this slice of pure existence also brings the shocking and disturbing realization that this life cannot and will not last forever.

It was too much for me that night. I wanted TV. I wanted my girlfriend. I wanted my housemates and I wanted to be distracted. I needed anything that would keep me from myself and my own thoughts. Instead, I had only my heartbeat and the darkness. After what seemed like an eternity of forced reflection, I finally fell asleep and no doubt dreamed of pot, pizza, and Tiger.

* * *

A dirty t-shirt, sweatpants and sandals are my “writing” outfit. Sitting at my computer in my tiny rental house less than a block off campus, I need to finish writing about that time my life did not change, that time I did not become a better person.

A knock on my door. “Togo’s?”

“Sure why not.” I leave my computer, get in my Honda, and drive the two blocks to the sandwich shop.

I have no complaints about college, my house, my friends, and my classes. These have been some of the best years of my young life, but I still think of that other life and those unanswered questions that I left in the tent next to Lower Morgan Lake. The questions in my head now are much more comfortable, but the scary self-confrontation, that absence of distraction, is something that I will confront again. I have to; I don’t have a choice. When I push away all the diversions of normalcy, I know how much I don’t know about me; no television show, video game, party, or iPod mix will help me answer my questions.

Mummies

Mummies rarely scared Jay. Small for a sixth-grader, Jay knelt by them and studied their faces through Plexiglas. He gave them new names, made them his friends. Usermontu, priest of God Monthu, was Monty. Nebuja, wife of Hori, mother of Ankhor, and Jay's favorite, was Nebby. Jay saw a smile frozen on her crusty face. He believed she was the happiest mummy he'd ever seen, and he liked to think she was smiling long before King Tut learned to crawl.

The Egyptian Museum docents worried. "Here again?" they asked Jay. "Why don't you get some fresh air, play with your pals, kick a ball around?" Jay told them his pals were there, in sarcophagi, bone arms folded across ribs. He said they were teaching him about death and that there was much to learn.

In Miss Ricketts' class, he had given a book report about embalmers, who had a heck of a job, slicing open corpses, using metal hooks to pull out livers, lungs, stomachs, intestines. He brought in a book he had bought at the museum gift shop. Jay held it up as he talked, showed drawings of Anubis-masked embalmers, coating yanked-out organs with natron, setting them to dry in alabaster canopic jars.

"This is a good report," Miss Ricketts had said. "So specific!"

"The only organ an embalmer left in the body was the heart," Jay told the class.

"How come?" Ryan Blackwell asked.

"Because he thought the mummy would need it in the next world, that she would use it to think and feel."

Amber Cantrell rolled her eyes and said, "You think with your brain, not your heart."

"That's not what Egyptians believed," Jay said.

"Maybe Egyptians were dumb," Amber said, sending giggles through the classroom.

"Maybe *you're* dumb," Jay said. He flipped to a drawing of a regal embalmer hooking out Queen Henettowey's brain through her nostril.

"That's disgusting!" Amber yelled.

"Jay, that will be enough now," Miss Ricketts said.

She didn't give him time to explain why there are mummies, about the ka—the double—needing a body to recognize as it floats in and out of the burial chamber. She made him sit down so Heather Martinez could show her blurry, boring slides of the Grand Canyon.

Jay didn't practice his book report with his mother. He knew her heart was fluttery, that it was hard for her to do more than watch television and talk about where he would live when she was gone. "I know this is hard," his mother told him, propped against pillows in her bed, a tray of ice cubes on her nightstand. "But I have to talk about these things. I have to make preparations." She tried to be cheerful, to smile, but to Jay the smile looked wrong.

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, Jay woke up, sweaty and cold, from a recurring nightmare in which he went into his mother's room, just to check, and found only strings of black bones hanging from ceiling to floor. The windows were open, and cold wind blew in, knocking the bones together in a terrible high clink. When he woke from the nightmare and ran to her room, shaking, he always found that nothing was out of place, that she was sleeping—snoring in a way he found lady-like, barely audible but there.

On a Sunday afternoon Jay went on the museum's tomb tour. The tour guide, Dr. Andrews, flashlighted the tour group into the full-size replica of Prince Khunmhotep's tomb, under the right-to-left prayer to Sun God Ra, down to the offering chamber. She showed hieroglyphics of wine, water, grain, beef, all carved into the stone wall.

"Ancient Egyptians believed the prince's invisible twin, his ka, got hungry, just as we do," she said. She shined light on the false door and said, "The ka would come in and out of the tomb here when he wanted a snack—think of it as a kind of Egyptian doggy door." People on the tour laughed. Jay ran his fingers along the hieroglyphs for the millionth time. "Follow me," Dr. Andrews said, "to the burial chamber—to the prince himself!" She led the group down steep stairs into the air-conditioned room with a red granite sarcophagus. "On the ceiling," she said, focusing her light, "you see Nut, Goddess of the Sky, watching over the prince." She said what Jay already knew, that Nut swallowed the sun each night and gave birth to it each morning.

"Tell us about the judgement scene," Jay said.

"Why don't you tell us about it," Dr. Andrews said. "You're probably a better expert than I am by now."

Jay took the flashlight and shined it on the far wall. "Here is the scale of Maat, Goddess of Justice," Jay told the group. "The prince's heart is weighed against Maat's feather of truth. If the prince has been good, the scale will balance and he will be welcomed by Osiris, Lord of the Dead." Jay trained the light on bearded Osiris in his blue gown, sitting upright in his black throne. "If he's bad, if his heart is heavy, it will tip the scale and will be eaten by Ahmet, the Beast."

"Excellent!" Dr. Andrews said, and the tour group clapped.

As Jay handed the flashlight back to Dr. Andrews, he thought he felt an icy breeze across the back of his neck. His hands started to sweat. "Is it cold in here?" he asked nervously. "I mean, aren't you freezing?"

"Well, no," Dr. Andrews said. She saw panic in Jay's eyes. "What's the matter, honey?"

"Why'd you call me honey?" Jay demanded. Though he knew it was impossible, he thought he could see the tomb's low ceiling getting lower. He was petrified, looking at the hieroglyph of Isis, Protector of Children. She was staring, Jay imagined, directly at him. He turned and ran from the burial chamber.

"Jay!" Dr. Andrews said, but he was in a sweaty sprint, up the stairs, through the offering chamber, out the portal toward the mummy cases. He ran straight for Nebby. On his knees, he pressed his face against the Plexiglas and saw something wrong.

Nebby stared darkly at the ceiling. She scared Jay with an ancient smile—with a heart still inside her.

A Trail in the Rain Forest

Along the trampled trail we've chosen,
the only one we can handle,
dew bends the bromelads
growing reckless in El Yunque,
"The only tropical rainforest in the US."
Where are the animals? my six-year-old asks.
Only small tree frogs, insects, lizards
scamper through the exotic plants
whose names I'll never know.

We walk past the graffiti,
modern hieroglyphics sprayed on rocks.
Pieces of paper, scatter like the birds
we try to spot, but they're hiding today
among the giant trees with heavy shoulders,
behind leaves wide as skirts that embrace us.

They say you can see a Taino's face in the rock,
questioning towards the heavens, petrified.
Before us, he worshipped spirits
who would not see the fauna contained,
understood an urgency unknown to us.
We can no longer hear the forest's whispers,
or see through the *forest of clouds*.

The trail comes full circle to where we started;
faded, as the Taino face we struggle to reclaim
among the shale, against the green, bubbling canopy.



robert tomlinson |
mixed media on paper
30" by 22"

Mirrored



| kristen jaber
mixed media
8.5" by 11"

Series "me and my converse"



katherine harper |
polaroids, plexiglass, wire
5" by 12" each

Hotei



| alexandra hallett
ceramic raku
firing by don fritz and james hanold

Transformation



pham trung |
oil on canvas
18" by 24"

Writing in the Dark #1



| robert tomlinson
ink on original photo collage
20" by 16"

Thick as Air



megan cutler |
acrylic and collage on canvas
36" by 36"

Splat!



| katherine harper
color photography
8" by 12"

The Starting End



dustin nguyen |
color photography
3" by 2"

No Fishing



| ross dakin
color photography
12.6" by 9.5"

Goldseekers



joseph brennan |
digital photography
5" by 7"

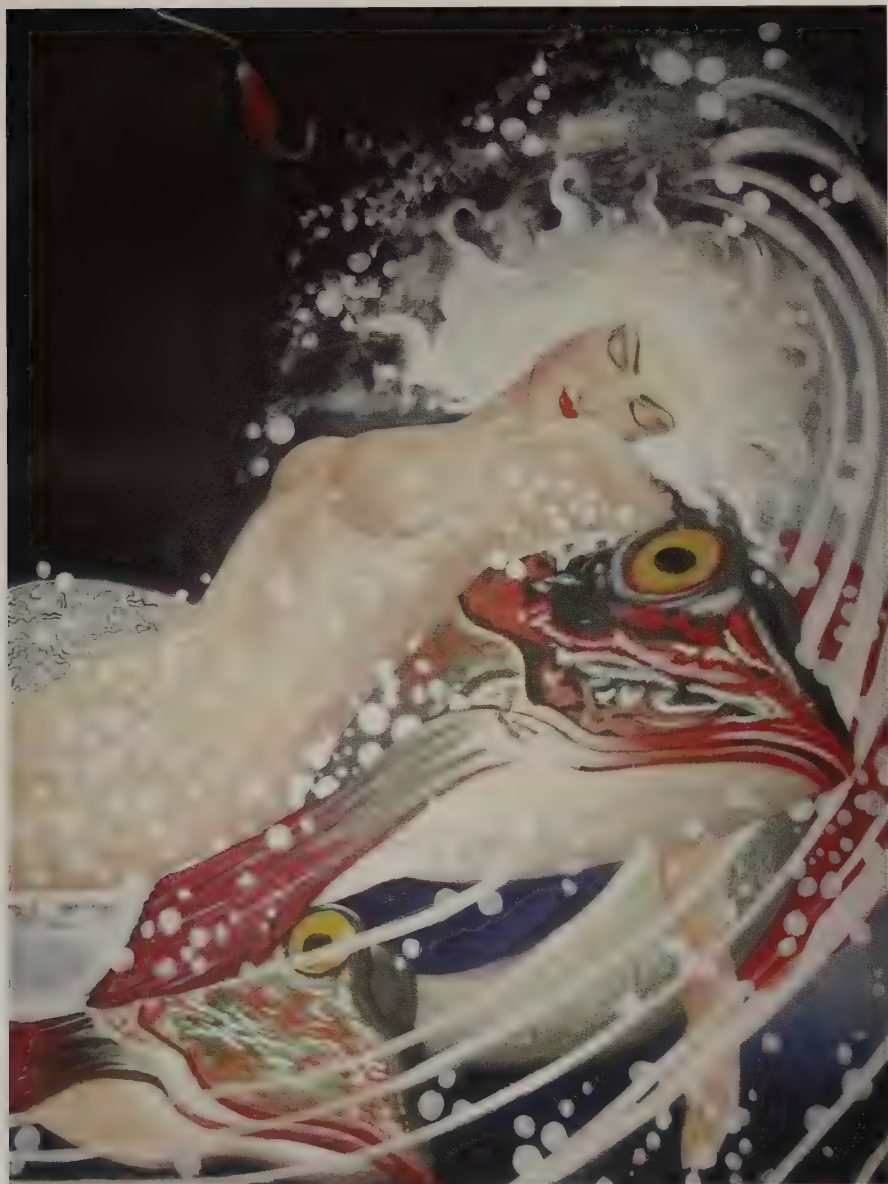
Mizu



| jennifer gochoco
color photography
6.6" by 8.8"

Nice Catch

Based on Creep Shadow by Virgil Finlay, 1942



kellie flint |
acrylic on canvas
27" by 36"

Shoe Prints



| lauren swigart
mixed media on wood
12" by 12"

Albert Mader

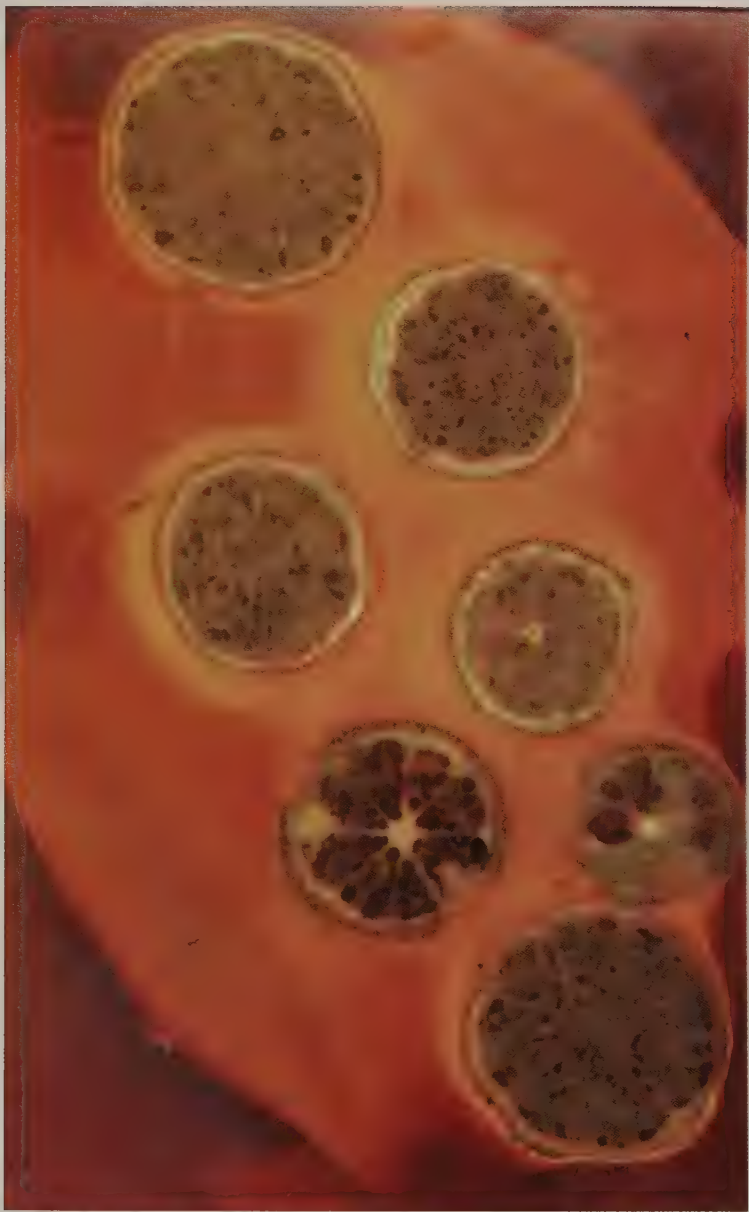


chris walker |
gelatin silver contact print
5" by 7"

Girl



| mark gee
oil on canvas
42" by 24"



steve gilson |
experimental photogram
5.4" by 8.7"

Bereba, Burkina Faso 2007



| david pace
color photography
17.2" by 11.3"

Bereba, Burkina Faso 2007



david pace |
color photography
22.5" by 28.8"

Kingfisher



| jeffrey brodtkin
watercolor on chinese rice paper
6.5" by 11.25"

Japanese Garden



ana raab |
black and white photography
6" by 9"

Mixed Media Flowers



| lauren swigart
mixed media
24" by 8" each



don fritz |
pastel, charcoal, gesso
60" by 42"

A Final Glimpse



| cristal friesen
mixed media
24" by 36"

i am trying to tell you my body is a
can of vegetables, an oven on preheat

surrounded by cans of golden
corn and french cut green beans
i told you the situation.
you, proficient shopper, considered
my story only long enough to choose
a can of pinto beans, to put
them in the cart, to pivot
on your heel towards the end
of the aisle. when we rounded
the corner, there were new things:
loaves of bread and dinner rolls.
i knew i did not belong
among the yeasts though my belly
was rising fast. and you did not speak
of it again. only turned a package of crescent
rolls over again and again
in your hands saying "this won't
do. this won't do. this just isn't
what i want."

a strange sense in a restaurant parking lot

sarah hugs like the wool sleeves
of a sweater. i cannot crawl out of her
warmth. she tells me
i am her favorite and i am
caught off guard. there are cars
in the parking lot, i am not sure
how many or what kind but they
are there, staring at us with
their wide-set unblinking eyes
and i feel uncomfortable and too conscious
of myself as one does
when being gawked at. maybe
they are envious, that we can
love. that we can create
energy right here in the middle
of time and space, a mini combustion
engine made from our two hearts
and the wires of common experience
with no key, no foot pressed hard
against our backs, no white-knuckled
hands deciding where we can
or cannot go. i hug her hard and kiss
her cheek. "we are lucky." i say
and she smiles, the white moons
of her teeth reflecting light
from the steel-spined street lamps
making it soft, subtle, easier to take.

Blue Psyche

from Anton Chekhov's short story "Anyuta"

(Blue spot comes up on WOMAN, standing nude, center stage. She sings tiredly, then retreats to a windowsill and sits on it. Lights come up to reveal the interior of an apartment, and PRESTON, reading.)

PRESTON. The right lung consists of three parts... Boundaries! Upper part on anterior wall of thorax reaches the fourth or fifth rib, on the lateral surface, the fourth rib... behind to the spina scapulae... The fourth or fifth rib, on the lateral surface. The fourth or fifth rib on the lateral surface. Lateral. Lateral. On the lateral surface. These ribs are like the keys of a piano.

(WOMAN sings. PRESTON tries to feel his ribs through his shirt.)

PRESTON. One must familiarize oneself with them somehow, if one is not to get muddled over them. One must study them in the skeleton and the living body...

(PRESTON pulls out a cigarette. As he does so, WOMAN rises, crosses to him, lights his cigarette, then returns to the windowsill. PRESTON continues to try to feel and count his ribs.)

PRESTON. Augh! I need some coffee.

(PRESTON goes to a cupboard and begins searching for coffee. WOMAN crosses to different cupboard, pulls out a jar with two or three coffee beans in it. She crosses to PRESTON, opens the jar, and pours the beans onto the counter.)

PRESTON. No coffee. Great. The upper part of the thorax reaches the fourth or fifth rib, on the lateral surface. One must study them in the skeleton and the living body.

(WOMAN moves to center stage and stands facing audience. PRESTON begins studying her body, feeling and examining her ribs.)

PRESTON. Can't feel the first rib, behind the shoulder blade. Here's the second, the third, and then this has to be the fourth. Okay. Yeah, all right. Stop wiggling. Sorry, cold hands. If I could turn on the heat... Okay. Fourth rib. Here. Fifth.

(PRESTON goes to his desk and finds a marker, then returns to WOMAN and begins to draw on her, marking her ribs one at a time. She starts to turn blue and shivers.)

PRESTON. Like the keys of a piano...

(There is a knock at the door. WOMAN begins a series of slow stretches. Enter KAPLAN.)

KAPLAN. You still up?

PRESTON. Of course.

KAPLAN. You gotta take a break sometimes, man. You're killing yourself.

PRESTON. Can't go into medicine without doing the time, right?

(WOMAN returns to windowsill.)

KAPLAN. Anatomy again?

PRESTON. You know, you'd think it would be such an easy subject. I mean, I have a body. I've got the bones, the muscles, the blood, it's so tangible, it's so—you know? Like, molecular structures and DNA and ribosomes, that's one thing, but a ribcage? Why is that such a headache?

KAPLAN. You doing okay?

PRESTON. I... I dunno. I guess so. Just gotta stay busy, keep my mind... I'll be all right.

KAPLAN. I'm working on a painting.

PRESTON. Yeah? What of?

KAPLAN. Psyche.

PRESTON. What?

KAPLAN. Psyche. You know, like the psyche.

PRESTON. ...Like the Greek chick? Cupid and Psyche or whatever?

KAPLAN. No, man, like the psyche. Cognition, memory, the part of the conscious being which masters fear and orders the self. It's an abstraction, man. Non-objective piece.

PRESTON. You're so bizarre, Kaplan.

KAPLAN. That's what they always say to great geniuses.

PRESTON. So, how's it coming?

KAPLAN. Well, slowly. I've been painting different models every day.

PRESTON. Models? What do you mean, what kind of models?

KAPLAN. Like, models, like women.

PRESTON. Women?

KAPLAN. Yeah, women, nude models.

PRESTON. What??? Man, you are so full of it. What do you tell them? I mean, do you tell them you're painting their psyches?

KAPLAN. ...Well, not exactly. I mean... not exactly.

PRESTON. You're ridiculous. Where do you find them? Where are you finding these women who are willing to hang around your apartment with no clothes on letting you paint them?

(WOMAN comes to stand center stage.)

KAPLAN. This one, Sandy, man you've gotta see this girl, she has got such a nice-

PRESTON. Psyche?

KAPLAN. Oh, she's so gorgeous. I should introduce you to her. Or Linda, she's really cool, you'd like her. She's an Anthropology major over at the university, and-

PRESTON. No, no, I—thanks, but no. You know, I'm still... I'm just trying to stay busy right now.

(PRESTON begins examining WOMAN'S ribcage.)

KAPLAN. Yeah, I understand, man. You know... I saw her yesterday.

PRESTON. —What? You saw...

KAPLAN. Yeah, out over at Bennigan's, I saw her as I was leaving. She asked about you, just like how you're doing and everything.

(PRESTON is silent.)

KAPLAN. It'll be all right, man, it's still fresh wounds, that's all. She didn't look that good. Like, she was all rangy looking and she was with these loud girls, like really loud and brassy.

(PRESTON remains silent.)

KAPLAN. Yeah, they were annoying, man, like so stupid. They were being all dumb and stuff. Anyway. Hey, can I ask you a favor?

PRESTON. Yeah.

KAPLAN. Well, the painting, you know, that I've been working on. I've hit a bit of a dry spot.

PRESTON. What do you mean?

KAPLAN. Well, I don't have any models this week. I was thinking...

PRESTON. ...Ah, yeah, sure. I should take a break, anyway. But I still have more studying to do tonight, so...

KAPLAN. No problem, man. Be back in a couple hours, easy. Take a break, Preston. Take a nap.

PRESTON. All right.

(WOMAN crosses to KAPLAN, and they exit. PRESTON returns to his book.)

PRESTON. Okay, so the upper part on the anterior wall of the thorax reaches the fourth or fifth rib, on the lateral surface, behind to the spina scapulae...

(PRESTON closes his book, locates a cigarette carton. It's empty. He lays down, falls asleep. The lights fade to black except a blue glow on his body. He now rises and faces the audience, a dream.)

PRESTON. Some people say that the colors an artist uses reflect the state of mind, the mood, the period in the artist's life. A sadness, a melancholy in blue and gray, new passion in red, hopefulness in green, a faded dandelion of silk petals, traced out in translucent pink, reminds the subconscious of tenderness. The thorax is a part of the body, a distinct section, the human body renews itself every seven years, in regeneration, in green again and again, and the fourth rib is secret. It's secret. I study medicine, anatomy, the ribcage. I dream of a new day when I meet patients in a large room, flanked with offices, filled with bottles, telephones and stacks of files with yellow index tabs, bright block letters of the patient's names, I drink coffee. My wife, a woman of taste, of refinement, I give her all she needs, she thanks me with indulgent looks from the passenger seat, shiny lips. This apartment is far behind, the blue washed clean from my linen and flushed out with the cold coffee grounds, and it's warm. We keep warm.

(WOMAN enters, lit in blue, now covered in ornate lines and curves, drawn all over her body.)

PRESTON. And my memories. Tied in to the psyche, to the subconscious, to Freudian masquerades and Las Vegas epic dissections of my heart, audiences staring. It hurts like razors, like scalpels pulling my chest open and dancing in black heels over my stomach and liver, like scalding hot iron liquid metal soldering stiff steel tentacles all through my capillaries, right lung, anterior wall, thorax! Kaplan saw it all.

(KAPLAN enters.)

PRESTON. He knew her ingenious desire to leave and break blood vessels, to paint me blue and forget to stitch the sutures.

KAPLAN. It's just fresh wounds, man, that's all. Forget her. You should meet Linda and move to Venezuela, help her study the Yānomamö societies, people who wear skins and turn into jaguars. Just forget her, okay?

PRESTON. Why did she go?

KAPLAN. She's loud, man, she had to go with the girls and be loud. They would just not shut up.

PRESTON. I wish she would come back.

KAPLAN. Preston, she tore you up. If she came back right now, would you really take her back?

(WOMAN goes to PRESTON, touches his face, returns to the windowsill, as KAPLAN exits. PRESTON lays back down, the dream over. His textbook falls on the floor, waking him, and the lights instantly come back up. After a moment, he sees WOMAN. She slowly crosses to him, their eyes locked, and she brings her face right up to his. He returns to his book.)

PRESTON. The right lung consists of three parts...

(WOMAN comes to stand behind PRESTON as he studies. She touches his head.)

PRESTON. Upper part on anterior wall of thorax. Behind to the spina...

Grilling Boys

(LISA and DEVON are sitting at a table in The Plume, a trendy French-fusion restaurant. They have already ordered and are eating and talking.)

DEVON. So the lady tells me, "We won't be able to get a tow truck out for about an hour, maybe longer. We're backed up." Unbelievable.

LISA. ... So, what did you do?

DEVON. I just walked back into town.

LISA. You walked?

DEVON. Yeah. I didn't want to wait.

LISA. How far was it?

DEVON. About fourteen miles.

LISA. Fourteen miles? *(He nods.)* Didn't that take a really long time?

DEVON. Well, I walk really fast.

LISA. *(to audience)* This is Devon. My friend Vince set us up. I usually avoid blind dates, but Vince has good taste, and I've been a bit bored lately. I figured, why not? If nothing else, I could have some fun messing with him and hear it from Vince. *(She glances at DEVON, who is eating. To audience:)* He's pretty good looking, don't you think? Let's start with occupation.

LISA. *(to DEVON)* So, Vince tells me you work doing sound editing.

DEVON. Yeah.

LISA. Do you like it?

DEVON. Absolutely. I love it. I've only been in it for a couple of years, but I was really fortunate to get a job with this studio.

LISA. What kind of things are you usually working on?

DEVON. Well, our last project was a major motion picture.

LISA. Really? What was it?

DEVON. "Breaking the Reins." Did you see it?

LISA. No, I don't think I've heard of that one.

DEVON. It was on prime time.

LISA. ... Oh, like a made-for-TV movie.

DEVON. Well, yeah. It had Sybil Shepherd in it.

LISA. Oh. Well, that's good...

DEVON. What about you? What do you do?

LISA. I'm a speech therapist.

DEVON. That must be interesting.

LISA. Yes, it is.

DEVON. Is it spicy?

LISA. What?

DEVON. The chicken. Is it okay?

LISA. Oh, yes, it's fine.

LISA. *(to audience)* I guess we'll move on. I've found that you can learn a lot about a person from the type of music they listen to. I was once really good friends with a girl, and then I found out that her entire music collection consisted of soundtracks and showtunes. We don't speak anymore.

LISA. (to DEVON) So, Devon, what kind of music do you like?

DEVON. Well, right now I'm really into white funk groups.

LISA. White funk?

DEVON. You know, like Wild Cherry? (He sings:) "Play that funky music, white boy!" You know? Talking Heads are really great, too. Oh! Have you heard the new album from They Might Be Giants?

LISA. I like your shirt.

DEVON. Oh. Thank you. I just got it.

LISA. (to audience) Strike two. You know, I remember once I dated a guy for about four or five weeks, and then one night I asked him what kinds of women he had dated in the past. He looked at me kind of funny, and said, "Just like you." I didn't say anything, but that really bothered me. I was his "type." I didn't want to be his "type." Let's throw Devon a zinger, shall we?

LISA. (to DEVON) What's your ideal woman?

DEVON. My what?

LISA. Your ideal woman. You know, what kinds of qualities do you look for?

DEVON. Um, well... Wow. My ideal... That's quite a question.

LISA. Oh, don't think too much of it. I just find it interesting.

DEVON. Well... I suppose... Okay. Do you eat butter?

LISA. Do I eat butter?

DEVON. Yeah, like do you ever buy butter?

LISA. Well, yes, I've bought butter.

DEVON. Have you ever bought Land O' Lakes Butter?

LISA. Um, I suppose I may have-

DEVON. Do you know the Native American girl on the front of the package?

LISA. Yes, I do.

DEVON. Her.

LISA. I'm sorry?

DEVON. That's my ideal woman.

LISA. The Land O' Lakes Butter girl is your ideal woman?

(DEVON nods. LISA turns to the audience.)

LISA. *(to audience)* This is one of those moments when you realize you're going to have a really good story to tell your friends later.

DEVON. Well, yeah. She's attractive, and she definitely has good poise—you can tell that just by looking at her, the way she holds her hands up and—well, you know. But, that's not really why. I suppose the thing I really like about her is—

(WAITER enters.)

WAITER. Can I get you anything else tonight?

DEVON. Would you—

LISA. No, I'm good.

DEVON. That's all, thank you.

(WAITER places the check on the table and exits.)

DEVON. Thank you.

(Both LISA and DEVON go for the check and grab one end of it.)

DEVON. Um, I thought I'd—

LISA. Thought you'd what? Don't worry, I've got it.

DEVON. I don't want you to have to—

LISA. Why not?

DEVON. Well, because—

LISA. Because you're the man?

DEVON. *(laughing)* No, I just—

LISA. Well, then there shouldn't be any problem. I'll be taking this.

(She tries to pull the check away.)

DEVON. No, I insist, I'd like to—

LISA. No, you won't!

(In a final pull she yanks the check away from DEVON, whose hand goes shooting back into his plate, splattering food onto the front of his shirt.)

LISA. Oh! Devon, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to—

(DEVON is wiping his shirt with his napkin.)

DEVON. Don't worry.

LISA. Oh, your shirt...

DEVON. That's all right, I only bought it for—

LISA. For what?

DEVON. For tonight.

LISA. For tonight?

DEVON. Yeah, I... Vince said something about how you like green, so...

LISA. You bought this shirt for tonight just because Vince said I like green?

DEVON. Well, yeah...

LISA. *(to audience)* Have you ever punched a puppy before? I mean, I never have, but it probably feels kind of like this.

LISA. *(to DEVON)* Here, let me help you.

(LISA gets up and goes over to DEVON, dabbing his shirt with her napkin.)

DEVON. Thank you.

(DEVON stares.)

LISA. What?

DEVON. Nothing, you're just—You're very pretty.

LISA. Um, thank you.

(LISA sits back down.)

DEVON. So, what about you?

LISA. I'm sorry?

DEVON. What's your ideal man?

LISA. Oh. Um, I don't know.

DEVON. You must have some idea.

LISA. I don't think he really exists.

DEVON. What do you mean?

LISA. When I was a little girl I believed in "Prince Charming" and love-at-first-sight and soulmates and all of that.

DEVON. But now you don't?

LISA. I believe people are attracted to each other. I even believe people care about each other. I just don't think there's anyone that I could ever truly be in love with.

DEVON. You don't believe in love?

LISA. I know there's forms of love, like I know people can feel love for one another, I just... Did your parents seem like they were truly happy? I don't mean just content, but did you think they were really in love the way you want to be?

(DEVON is silent.)

LISA. I'm sorry. I have a tendency to be kind of cynical. You know, when I was a kid I refused to sit on Santa's lap at the mall?

DEVON. Why?

LISA. I was convinced that he was pickpocketing all the kids! You didn't finish telling me about your ideal woman. What's the real reason you like her?

DEVON. Oh. She's overlooked.

LISA. Overlooked?

DEVON. I mean—She's not flashy. She's not trying to get your attention. We all buy the butter and we don't even notice her, we don't know her name, we don't know anything about her, but she's always there. She's always there, regardless, and she's always beautiful, but not because she's trying to be or because we're told that she is. She just is.

LISA. That's... kind of nice, actually. I don't know how you notice things like that.

DEVON. I'm kind of a strange guy.

LISA. I guess so. Who else finds his soulmate in the dairy section?

DEVON. I thought you didn't believe in soulmates.

LISA. It's a beautiful idea, but it just seems like it's too poetic to be true.

DEVON. Maybe you're just looking too hard.

LISA. Ha, I'm hardly looking at all.

DEVON. No, I mean at the concept itself. Maybe you're right-maybe there's no Prince Charming, there are no soulmates, there's no love-at-first-sight. Maybe love isn't all fireworks and shooting stars.

LISA. Then why is it so great? Why is there so much fuss about it?

DEVON. Because it's simple and quiet and true. And without it, what are we really doing here?

LISA. You mean like right now?

DEVON. No. I mean in life.

LISA. *(to audience)* I've been looking around for a long time, searching for this perfect person. I've been trying to find someone who meshes with me just right and has all the things I look for. You know, I want him to think with his mind instead of his penis, but I still want him to have charm. I want him to be intelligent, but not geeky. I want him to be well spoken, but not arrogant. I want this, I want that, and I have this big, long checklist that I hold up before a guy can even open his mouth, and I guess I'm finally realizing that because of this, my little interviews that I call dates are just... This person doesn't exist. But then, maybe he does. Maybe I've met him, but I shut him down before he could introduce himself.

DEVON. So, if I let you pick up the check this time, will you let me get it ... next time?

LISA. Next... ? Okay. You can get it next time.

DEVON. Maybe Thursday?

LISA. Thursday. Yes, I'd like that.

Katrina's Eyes

There had to be more than one.
No single eye could cry enough

to spawn this reservoir of sorrow,
the archipelago of rooftops

where the frightened leap in gambits
of survival, where the mad

wave their arms like Moses
and the old do the slow fade,

where a saint shares his last bowl
of red beans and rice

as he wonders if rain
will ever be just rain again.

Fortune Telling in America

So many things here are surrounded
by concertina wire. You need to be psychic
sometimes to determine whether
it's meant to keep people out or in.
I'm no gypsy—I can never tell
if it's time to break and enter
or break and exit. I have no idea
when to carry cutlery,
or even which side of the fence I'll be on
tomorrow. I wish it were clearer,
so I could judge when to snip and where,
whether I should escape or just sit back
and watch the show. That's why
I bought an 8-ball. With a wristflick I see
through the hours, past the bodies
that tried and failed, dangling on both sides
of a common wish. I get simple answers now
and I'm not frightened any more
by unknowns, the girl who never was
and will never be, leaders
who won't underpin the economy
with something more tangible
than the operating speed of a printing press.
I think they might have sold me
the politically correct model, though. He balks
and shows an empty window
whenever I ask about money. I came up
with a plan to remove both our inhibitions.
I bought us plum-colored polo shirts
with alligators on them
and a condo in Boca, complete
with lifetime membership to the links
and the soothing view of a prison. I insisted

that last item come with a sharpened perimeter.
It's a good thing I brought him with me
when I forked over the down payment.
He reminded me to get that in the contract.

I Have Been to Babi Yar

It's April 19th, 2004. We shuffle out of a mustard-colored school bus onto grass still wet from the night before. It has been raining, and the skies above Kyiv are filled with damp smoke from the wood-burning stoves. Our group, a combination of two-dozen or so Ukrainian and American students and teachers, has spent the last month learning about the Ukrainian involvement in World War Two. We have recorded countless hours of interviews with veterans, visited museums, monasteries, cathedrals and monuments. The weary faces that we spoke with daily finally contextualized all that we have learned throughout grade school about the war. Our final excursion has led us to a shallow ravine called Babi Yar, located in the Northwestern quarter of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine.

* * *

Between September 29th and 31st, 1941, Nazis rounded up and murdered over one-hundred and fifty thousand Jews. Most lives were extinguished by rifles fired at point blank. After the massacre was complete, the Nazis smoothed piles of dirt over the tangled bodies in Babi Yar. Those who were missed by the bullets—or who were not fatally wounded—swallowed mouthfuls of dirt and suffocated. These are facts, numbers, abstractions, and they're powerful and appalling.

Still, what draws us to those sites where such atrocities were committed? Do we seek the first-hand experience in hope of deeper understanding, deeper sympathy, for those fallen victims of massacres that occurred years ago?

* * *

The soft rim of a ravine, blanketed in grass cut like a fairway, yawns before us. I am apprehensive and bewildered, taken back by the immensity of the shallow valley called Babi Yar, astounded by the serenity—the groomed hedges bordering the western rim, a colossal statue cloaked in fresh bouquets of flowers, a vast cerulean sky. We

spread out, some joining hands, and draw nearer to the lip of the forty-foot deep ravine.

Suddenly I am pulled sixty-two years into the past. The season changes; it's September the 29th. I can feel my friends linking their hands under my elbow; I can hear people shutting their doors tightly, joining a throng of bodies trudging up a street littered with torn notices. The Nazis nailed them to our doors, posted them on shop windows, scattered them throughout the streets. They are all written in Russian and read:

All Jews living in the city of Kyiv and its vicinity are to report by 8 o'clock on the morning of Monday, September 29th, 1941, at the corner of Melnikovsky and Dokhturov Streets (near the cemetery). They are to take with them documents, money, valuables, as well as warm clothes, underwear, etc. Any Jew not carrying out this instruction and who is found elsewhere will be shot.¹

We arrive at the appointed location and form a pulsing throng of coated and weeping bodies. Children are wailing, and I can hear shouts coming from up ahead. We believe we are being deported. We will board trains and will be shipped out of the country to work for the Fascist Army. Two Nazis ask us to leave our luggage on the side of the road—telling us that it will be picked up by a luggage cart and shipped later. They are holding heavy metal guns; we don't have a choice.

The crowd surges forward, and we're thrust through a gauntlet of Nazi men standing shoulder to shoulder armed with guns and shields and clubs. We are pushed out onto the apron of a wide ravine and told to join hands. The Nazis lead us to the edge of the ravine, shove us down onto our knees, step back, and shoot bullets into our backs. Some topple forward, roll down the slope of the ravine, and join a tangle of writhing, moaning bodies; others slump onto their sides, a dead weight the Nazis kick over the edge with their steel-toed boots.²

* * *

1. Anatoli, A. *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*. Trans. David Floyd. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970. 91.

2. Rosenberg, Jennifer. "Babi Yar." *About: 20th Century History*. 2007. 20 May. 2006 <<http://history1900s.about.com/od/holocaust/a/babiyar.htm>>

It is again the present, but for a lingering moment I still see the mass burial: a catacomb, its passages formed by writhing arms, its recesses echoing with cries for air. But slowly it's filled in, covered by manicured grass, shadowed by a statue, bounded by hedges. I sit down at the edge of the slope, shield my eyes from the pressing slant of the early morning rays, and gaze at the statue which rests on the lip of the opposite side of the ravine: a mass of fallen men piled atop each other—their faces swept with anguish, their bodies contorted—each reaches skyward, yearns for heaven and deliverance from earthen tombs. Slowly, a seeping and momentous awareness of what really happened at Babi Yar infuses me with hatred and pity; I feel myself joining a powerful commemoration of wasted lives, of unthinkable genocide, that resounds silently throughout the gorge. The words of the Ukraine poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko flit across my lips, sink into my heart.

Above Babi Yar the wild grass rustles,
the trees look threatening, as though in judgment.
Here everything silently screams,
and, baring my head,
I feel as though I am slowly turning grey.
And I become a long, soundless scream
above the thousands and thousands buried here,
I am each old man who was shot here,
I am each child who was shot here.
No part of me can ever forget this.³

An old woman with a floral babushka tied neatly around her head, holding the hand of a small boy with a woolen vest, pleated pants, and tousled black hair, walks through our group and stands before a granite menorah secured in a block of concrete layered like steps; it's nearly ten feet tall. The woman spreads out her hand and presses it against the memorial, as though she were comparing hand sizes with a giant. The little boy slips his hand away from the rapt old woman and waddles down the rock steps, cautiously slipping through our group, our legs like redwoods above him, coming to a stop a few feet from the edge of the ravine. He cocks his head sideways and catches my eye

3. Yevtushenko, Yevgeni. "Babi Yar." Trans. Benjamin Okopnik, October 1996.

Remember: A Cybrary of the Holocaust. <<http://www.remember.org/witness/babiyar.html>>

because I'm sitting, my arms stretched behind me, elbows locked. He raises his hand, pulls thick curls off his forehead, and points toward the colossal monument perched directly across the ravine, rocking forward on his toes, almost losing his balance. A toothless grin cracks across his face as he squeaks and turns around to look for the old woman.

My teacher, Niki, a petite woman with short grey hair and crisp hazel eyes, leaves a cluster of students, walks up to the child, and kneels before him, touching him on the shoulder. The boy turns around and squeaks again as she wraps her arms around him, embracing him, resting her head on his shoulder. Tears run down her face and collect in beads on his woolen vest. The old woman slips through our group, walks up behind Niki, darts her eyes first at the boy and then at the crying woman, lets them rest on the monument shadowing the ravine. A moment passes, and then the woman reaches down and delicately cups Niki under the arm and pulls her to her feet. Turning to look at the woman's face, Niki tries to suppress another wave of tears with a hiccup and a smile; she breaks down again, wrapping her arms around the woman, pulling the floral babushka back a bit on the woman's head, revealing wisps of grey hair. The old woman grins, pats Niki warmly on the back and says something in Russian to the boy.

At this point, everyone in our entire group has interrupted their own conversations and is staring, stone-faced, at their crying teacher, the old woman marked with cord-like wrinkles, and the young boy. Many let smiles slip from their faces and let tears run down their cheeks. Some turn their heads, blow their noses into crumpled tissue; some silently rub their eyes. I'm simultaneously embarrassed and crushed by a wave of anguish. This meeting of the child's naiveté with the full knowing grief and understanding shared by the older women, both manifested on the edge of Babi Yar, is almost too much. I turn my head to stare at the statue as tears blur my vision.

* * *

Is this why I've found myself—why we find ourselves—compelled to travel to sites of past violence and bloodshed? To attach faces and names to the people recorded in history books as numbers—to the people remembered through monuments and poems? I recall the unexpected presence of the old woman and the young boy. I recall the babushkas smeared with blood, the smiles twisted into cries; the

old woman and the young boy, the manicured ravine, and the colossal statue who all bring home the reality of those who fell in piles beneath my feet. I did not survive genocide or witness a massacre of my people, but I have begun to understand what happened on that cold September morning; I have started down the road of empathy for those fallen victim to inhumanity—to a startlingly brutal and appalling hatred.

I have been to Babi Yar.

My Puissant Pillar

I was only a child the first and only time I fell in love, and now as I remember the event—under the influence of that golden tide which so magically washes over such distant thoughts—I fear that the Love will never, and furthermore, *can* never be matched again. And, incommensurable as it may be to the true-love-seeking hopes of all *you* jokers, the aforementioned claim submits itself not only to me but to the entire world.

When this event took place, I was your average pugnacious little eight-year-old. I know, I know, that sentence most likely completely discredited my mission statement, especially in your aged (and make sure you stress the “ed” in “aged”) minds, but please hear me out. Please believe me. Anyway (and no, I’m not starting a new paragraph), I was your average eight-year-old. However (and what a big “however”), I had managed to live my life in a great strata of disengagement through the likes of a most vivid imagination where reality literally was in my (and only my) mind, and any other realities simply did not exist. I had grown up in a neighborhood with few children and a set of parents whose fear of the outside world (and this, I have to say, was unfortunately legitimate, being that we lived in a “difficult” part of town) had resulted in a governing philosophy most dependent upon the almighty pillar of the almighty Sequester (whether it be in my room, the dining room, or the backyard)—even to the extent that my mother sacrificed her promising career in law so that she could home-educate me. My parents liked to know where I was at all times, and so I, of course, lacking both the resources and funds for rebellion, pretended I was elsewhere and found my freedom in the elaborate theatrics of my pre-pubescent mind.

Through the movies I had seen (which were sparse and PG) and stories I had read (which were myriad and *maybe* PG-13), I quickly developed personas fulfilling every one of the great Homeric values so epitomized in the pathos, logos, and, most definitely, ethos of each protagonist I saw. I suppose I could say that Robin Hood, G.I. Joe, and any cowboy for that matter, were the contributors of greatest profundity

regarding both the genesis and unwavering sedimentation of this characteristic in my daily behavior. This heroic emulation, also, of course, and quite imperatively, necessitated that each villain, and moreover, each ignoble antic he represented, was despised and shunned with an indomitable hatred so intensely steadfast that I sometimes felt endowed by God himself with the virtue I wielded. I rescued girls but never took advantage of them; I killed but never murdered; and, with the most vigor (and most frequency, I might add), gave my life many, many times so that the soul of another, much more deserved person could live on—such enactments (the sacrificial ones at least) were often so moving that I would find tears rolling down my cheeks as my last breaths were taken and my final, heroic, but *always* modest, speech was given. Indeed, I was prepared.

As I mentioned before, I was home schooled. I know that for many, this fact has probably already begun its initiation of debate over the psychological implications which this in-house upbringing had on a child like me, especially the one I have described so far. But please, I beg you, stray from such complications and focus, remembering always the context of *all* that I say (I mean “write,” of course, for you technical sweethearts).

So, as I was saying, I was home schooled. This educational situation often coincided with the responsibilities and errands of my teacher/mother, and field trips were regularly to places of great practicality—such as the grocery store, the post office, and, of course, my favorite, the bank. She, my mother, never explicitly told me, but I always figured (and still to this day), that these “field trips” were for a future benefit, a future time when these places would be common destinations of life, and frequent trips to them, especially at such a young age, could only, whether consciously or not, prepare me for my *practical* future. I think she thought that the civil on-goings of these functions of society would somehow seep into my pores and enlighten me with the knowledge I needed to survive in the modern world. I usually didn’t mind the trips, though, and again, as I already mentioned, of them all, my favorite was the bank.

This bank-admiration spawned from my (this may just be a good-old “American” characteristic) complete obsession with money. However, this money-obsession was hardly cormorant. It was, instead, a direct product of, once again, the stories and characters that so nurtured my behavior. Money was a constant theme, a constant catalyst,

a constant *moral* in most of my sources of affinity, and so, naturally, it was very real in my life (which of course should have had a “so-called” in front of it) but at the same time almost never tangible. I only saw money. I *never* touched it. I only could think about it, and the bank was its palace, so I revered the bank in a way an ancient civilized person might revere the stars.

On the day of Great Love (yes, I know, *finally*), it was one such Bank Day, and my mother and I arrived as normal. In through the glass doors and into the lobby. She immediately stood in line, and I immediately wandered—but it wasn’t simple wandering—for I was being led by the command of the cigarette-smoking, beret-wearing foreigner, Captain Killer (my creative abilities for name-assigning weren’t that good, I know), who had double-jointed thumbs, a black mustache, a chain wallet, and a never ending supply of the most treacherous ambitions. This was, perhaps, the villain I dealt with most, and on this day, he was as frantic as ever. He was threatening by holding me (the ultimate savior of mankind) hostage in exchange for the world’s money supply, which of course this very bank was in possession of. Now, since I know that you must be palpitating on the edge of your seats and gnawing off your poor little finger nails in the suspense of such potentially catastrophic events (regardless of how economically far-fetched they may have been), I am going to break from sequence a bit (since that is *my* luxury) and describe the girl that I’m sure you have been dying to hear about.

See, I had noticed this girl before I wandered, or rather, was coerced, off. She and her mother were standing in front of my mother in the unusually long line to the teller (for we didn’t have ATM’s back then). The little girl was standing very close to her mother, in fact clinging to her, the mother’s, dress like a wild baby chimpanzee might—that is, of course, if mother chimpanzees wore dresses. The little girl had a dress of her own, and I remember being strangely impressed by it. It was a, what seemed to me, *very* stylish, black-and-white dress with a sleek, spy-like quality. It was black on both the top and bottom and white in the stomach region, which made her look like the perfect Oreo cookie. The dress also showed just the right amount of her knees, so that their pudginess was hid, but they, her knees, were not (I suppose a psychoanalytic would title it Little Girl Cleavage or something terribly vulgar like that). However, neither this dress, nor this girl, impressed me enough to take precedent over the situation I was *really* and most

dutifully subjected to. Her image stayed with me for a moment, but it was gone just as quickly as I was. I know this may break the heart of all you love-at-first-sighters, and I'm sorry, sincerely, but it just didn't happen that way—which might possibly be (but I won't say it) a note worth taking.

And now, with that brief stop, back to the Main Event.

I had surreptitiously maneuvered my way underneath a vacant bank official's desk, which in my mind was not a desk at all but a garrison. I had, by that point, escaped from the nefarious Captain Killer and was now in the shadows of my conclave, hatching my ingenious counter objectives. I knew that the Captain would be swift, so I had to act quickly, but just as I was about to abandon my post and assault my nemesis, I heard a piercing scream. This was rapidly followed by a cacophony of yelling, footsteps, more screaming, and then, suddenly as it began, utter silence.

I peeked my head around the corner of the desk and looked around. It must be known (most likely out of mere admiration for my childhood-self) that in this peek, there was absolutely no trepidation, but simple curiosity. I had never heard screaming in a bank before, so of course I wanted to see what was happening. However, what I saw did startle me. I saw no other than *the* Captain Killer! (Now, I know even the exclamation point won't make you, the average reader, believe this, and in fact, I still have trouble with it, but I swear, on even the Mother's Grave I was swearing on as a child, that it was him.)

He stood there with his black mustache, wearing a red beret and a chain wallet. I could easily excuse his lack of cigarettes (even *my* Captain Killer rarely smoked while he was working), but I noticed that his thumbs most certainly *could* have been double-jointed. As this was registering and being digested in my marching-to-a-different-drum mind, I also, but abstractly, and quite dispassionately, noticed what was in his hands. In his right, the hair of the girl in the Oreo dress—which, by the way, was incredibly long and blonde. In his left hand was a gun. And the gun was shiny. I will never forget how shiny that gun was; it was even shinier than the ultra blonde hair of the little girl. Everywhere that gun went, so went my eyes: to the teller, to the ceiling, to the ground, to my mother, and finally to the little girl's head.

And at that point, as if someone had just dumped a bucket of cold water on my head, or ripped the record I was listening to off the turntable, or maybe just slapped me across the face—whatever the

analogy—I was Aware. It was Captain Killer standing there; that was something abundantly clear, but what he was doing was real. What he was doing wasn't just in my head, and furthermore, *who* he was doing it to was real. It was all real; it was all in motion; and that, and that alone, was the instant, the definitive instant, when I fell in love.

The Captain was swaying, arboreal-like, while his free arm, the one with the gun, behaved with terrible indecision, not staying on a target for more than a moment. The girl, though, the girl, she didn't move. Even when the Captain yanked violently enough to upset the balance of most grown women, she still stood there, firm and resolute. She was a pillar, and instantly she became *my* pillar. My Puissant Pillar. And just as the situation was *real*, so was this love. I hadn't even seen her face yet (which, I need to add, speaks volumes about the *actual* necessity of physical attraction in True Love), but her stance, her composure, her willingness to stand there, to occupy that space, right under the nose of the very object of my entire loathing, was all I needed. I loved her. I loved her because I was inspired, and it was beautiful and it was real. Now I had to act.

I stuck my head fully out from behind the desk, which was a desk now, and rose to my feet slowly. As I did this, I made sure to keep my head pointed away from my villain because that's always, always how the heroes stood up in their final, fateful bout with their enemy. I was trained for this. I was ready. It was real now, but I was prepared. She needed a savior, and it was going to be me.

As I raised my eyes, I glanced at my mom lying on the floor. I will never forget the look that she gave me. There was a ferocity in her eyes that I had never seen before. Her face muscles were strained as if she were giving birth, and there were many veins, bulging out like speed bumps on a road that I had never seen before. It was obvious that she had something on her mind, something she urgently needed to tell me. But I was impervious. I was ready. I looked at my mom with the eyes of the One in Control, a look that told her, "Easy. Everything is going to be alright."

The Captain and the girl's backs were still facing me. He was still yelling and shaking, but I wasn't listening. As far as I was concerned, he was interrupting me. I breathed in deeply.

"Captain!!!" I yelled, emphasizing the "tain" and lengthening it until my breath was gone. "You get your vile hands off that girl." (Now, this, I'm almost positive, was a line directly out of the only John

Wayne movie I had ever been allowed to see, but now, in my older years, I can't remember which one—which is *absolutely* infuriating.) When I said this, I could feel that my face was red, but my arms were by my sides, and my hands were in the classic quick-draw stance.

It was as if my words were paralysis-injected. The Captain froze (which I can't say surprised me, no, not me), and then he turned, slowly, just like I had risen, just like villains are supposed to. As he did, he let go the hair of my beloved Oreo. She (and this even further proves that it was true) stayed right where she was. The only movement she made was to turn, revealing her face, and look at me, whispering, with very delicate lips, an inaudible, "I love you." It was incredible, but so *right*, and all so real. Yes, it was love. But I couldn't mouth my acceptance, for the Captain had also made his full turn. One thought of doubt passed through my head—it was brief and put away quickly—the thought that I might have missed my chance to mouth back, to tell her all that I *too* felt by the movement of my own delicate lips.

Thank God the Captain wasn't smoking a cigarette, though. A cigarette, at that instance, at that crux, might have kept the thoughts coming. But he wasn't, and the only thing I looked at was his mustache. I stared at its blackness.

He yelled at me, using some adjectives I had never heard before (which I, of course, simply attributed to his foreignness), and told me to get on the floor or I was a "dead man." That was his tragic mistake. "Man" was a bad word for him to use. It only heightened my confidence.

"I know that gun," I yelled back quickly, still staring at his mustache. "I know. I know its shine." I cleverly repeated the "I know's" just like any upright man would.

The Captain looked at his gun, but it was only a glance. I still stared at his mustache.

He told me again to get on the floor. There was a moan in the background, a man's oddly, but other than that it was quiet. I let the quietness resonate. *Let him feel it*, I thought, *let him feel it in his dirty rotten blood*. I let this silence (and notice it was I who let it) continue for a few seconds and then, finally, I raised my eyes and looked into his. They were fear. Complete fear.

"Do you know *how* I know that gun?" I questioned, but slower, letting every word sink in, and careful not to blink, just like a master

staring down his dog.

The Captain didn't answer. So I did.

"I know," I yelled in the best bellow I could muster, "Because I *also* have that gun."

Because I was looking so intently, I could see his pupils shrink.

Captain Killer dropped his gun (the same gun, which is quite ironic if you think about it, that I had fended him off with many, many times before) and ran out of the bank. My eyes didn't follow him. They went directly to the girl, my girl, and my mouth whispered, "I love you." She nodded, and we stood there, stuck in time (as overused as that may be), looking at each other and knowing, simply *knowing*. The evil had absconded and the love had been made.

Her mother whisked her away, as did mine, and the Love ended there. But it had begun. It had happened. It was real and will never be matched again. No. No, it won't.

The Pirate's Wedding

"The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely."

— Carl Jung

To reach it you must sail a green sea,
the invitation clutched
in your teeth like a dagger.
Carry with you
your pure, pure heart,
a soul nursed on rum toddies,
satin heels for dancing.
As you enter the sanctuary,
choose sides—the groom's masculine, mustachioed.
The bride's—shimmering whitely,
hearts tattooed amid red roses.
Veiled against seeing and being seen,
the bride's escorted, a sacrifice,
to the altar. She turns back
clear-eyed, smiling,
her hands on the oars.
Do not love her.
Do not love the wedding party,
that band of thieves.
Tread carefully
among their gleaming hooks,
their scarlet cummerbunds.
Hold to your own dreams—
though heavy as anchors,
they are all you have to sail on.

The Cat

Slept like a dormant desire with the beetles and ants
beneath the rhododendrons until

the young wife brushed the soot into the bushes like an errant
wish, and the old woman noticed,

the sylvan neighbor tending hydrangeas and peas
for the gatekeeper of eternity—she turned a weary eye to that
broom

where the speckled dust of brown and black, a mottled river, clung,

Flew in hurricanes over the verdant bush, blackening the green,
almost nuclear, effervescence, shaking the cat from a hidden
paradise.

The cat ran to the crone, sowing hermetic ash on her like ink on
parchment.

What began the woman's rage, what stung her heart
but memory of the infernos, love and oppression?

Love released by the flowers in her yard, by the feline in her arms,
a digging of claws into the cosmic flesh.

and when the wife had left for her despair, little remained.
silenced rage can expand, writing its history

with a flick of the tail, carried inside the house.

Healthy Appetite

It was the rubber band that forced Felicity to change her mind about fate. Peering down at the stretched-out band beneath her, its shape twisted into a thick cursive S, Felicity couldn't bear to move, unwilling to disturb its warped perfection with breathing. Fifteen minutes passed before she finally raised her head and fake-smiled at a dour old woman with crystal cats-eye glasses, directing her to the proper aisle for laxatives and Nivea hand cream. By then, she had already decided to let the rubber band stand for Sam's initial.

* * *

It amazed Felicity how loyal Fern's Drug Store customers were. How they returned, again and again, to buy birthday balloons or a throw-away wind-up camera or loud turquoise compacts of Cover Girl face powder. When she clocked in each morning at seven-o'clock, Felicity paused by the automatic doors and gazed at the store with barely concealed disdain, her lips tugged into a disgusted grimace as she viewed the domino-stack aisles, the endless rows of Lay's chips and canned birthday cake frosting and long, wrinkled sticks of beef jerky that smelled like wet cow. The floors, once white, now lay dented with waxy black scuff marks, and the magazine racks near the registers were in a constant state of disarray, *Bon Appetit* and *Healthy Living* mixed indecorously with *InStyle* and *ElleGirl*.

As she sat on her stool at the Customer Service desk Monday morning, Felicity restrained herself from lunging at the throat of every coupon-carrying buffoon who came her way. She couldn't stand customers, really, and they knew it. Trailer-park mothers of five with bottle-blond curls and sweatshirts that smelled like Fritos, old men who wore tweed golf caps and rambled about new episodes of NOVA, tweens who sauntered in clouds of Calagon and wore charms like broken-heart halves around their necks—it took an extra chocolate Viactiv for Felicity not to tear the band from her ponytail, rumple her hair like a savage, and scream. Here she was—an unmarried thirty-four year old with a one-bedroom apartment downtown, no boyfriend, and regular

Saturday dinners with her mom—who dealt with people who couldn't find Colgate Total or needed to return liters of flat, half-priced root-beer that their mothers-in-law had gotten on sale. Sometimes, Felicity caught herself staring out the automatic doors in a daze, admiring how the breeze made dead leaves dance like frenzied butterflies.

* * *

Why had she let herself be swayed by a rubber band last Wednesday? Felicity was, after all, a sensible girl—destiny never crept into her thoughts or dwelt like a luminous phantom in her dreams. This morning had been as unromantic as ever: a going-through-the-motions ritual that involved alarms set for dawn and splashing water onto her swollen face. After buttoning the front of her burnt-toffee Fern's employee shirt and pinning her name above her now-diminished chest, Felicity carefully bent into her bathroom mirror and practiced relaxing her face into a frown, working a cultivated nonchalance into her eyebrows and the corners of her hesitant lilac eyes. Sam barely even raised his storm-gray gaze to hers. Stationed at the bright, hospital-blue oasis of the pharmacy situated in the back of the store, he was a white-coated prescription-drug guru who belly-laughed and smiled with his eyes. Still, Felicity knew better—she had to protect herself.

Jeffery had taught her at least that much.

That morning, alone in her green-tiled bathroom with the broken faucet, Felicity willed Sam from her mind and ignored how the bathroom light illuminated the rotten-eggplant circles under her eyes, how her auburn hair hung down her jutting cheekbones, her skin scarred with fading blemishes. Make-up was pointless. Ready, Felicity swiped on some ChapStick, downed a fat glass of cran-apple cocktail, and breezed out the door.

* * *

"You're not eating. Again." Her mom's voice, bright and crackling as a beach bonfire, never failed to burst into Felicity's ears and make her cringe. Her mom had made lamb kebab this time.

"I am, Mom—I had some meat, see? Some green beans."

"You're too thin," her mom said, shaking her head as she skewered a piece of well-done lamb with her fork, dipping it into a small

pool of Paul Newman marinara. “You don’t want to loose your curves, no one will touch you.”

Felicity held her breath, exhaled slowly. “Let’s just eat tonight, okay?”

“Jeffery wasn’t worth a pot to piss in,” said her mom with a harsh laugh, her gold bangles dangling. Romance had left her mom a long time ago. After all, she divorced Felcity’s dad—a used car salesman who now lived in Chicago—twenty years ago. Her mom’s last relationship was a one-month fling with a Polish dry-cleaner named Steve who bathed in Polo and toasted BLTs on his industrial-size pants-presser.

As they sat at the kitchen table, a single red taper burning a stream of smoke into the overhead stained-glass lampshade, Felicity’s mom spat out Jeffery’s name as if he were some invisible bunny friend Felicity had long outgrown. “What does he know about women’s bodies, nothing! When I was a girl, let me tell you—”

“Mom, please... .” Felicity stared down at her dinner plate, which held three charred kebabs and a small teepee of overcooked green beans. “It’s not him.”

She knew it was a lie, and she didn’t care. When Jeffery—a near-sighted gynecologist who wore Gap khakis and read slim, serious-looking medical journals each morning with decaffeinated coffee and bran flakes—left her life about a year ago, Felicity vowed to become a goddess. It wasn’t that she considered herself fat or unattractive. She had never been ashamed of her size-twelve curves, the way she looked in a black one-piece bathing suit. Every other Wednesday, as she passed the Clocktower bakery on the way home from Fern’s, Felicity would even buy herself a fat, white-frosted cupcake, carrying it back to her apartment in a Pepto-pink box. She would solemnly lick away the buttercream while standing over the sink in her kitchen. She would eat the whole thing.

That Jeffery had actually grimaced at her, his nose crumpled in disgust, during their last dinner date had convinced her to change; the cool, calculating way he called her fat as she dug her fork into the dark-chocolate torte she’d ordered to celebrate their third anniversary.

Since then, Felicity vowed to be healthy, fit, wholesome, glowing—the kind of girl who toted V-8 to the gym and winked into Macy’s dressing-room mirrors, grinning at her reflection in three different angles. She was that girl now, more or less; a shrunken, smaller version of her once-voluptuous self. A girl who lived off precut carrots, apples,

and purse-dented cans of caffeinated Diet Coke. Late at night, curled like a fetus in her bed, glancing at the pictures of orchids and fossilized seashells that hung on her creamy peach walls, Felicity memorized the protruding arch of her ribs underneath, how her now-prominent hip bone felt smooth as polished stone under her fingers.

* * *

February had come to Indiana, and Felicity tried not to throw up into the fake potted palms near the automatic doors. Already, great cardboard boxes of love-booty hovered next to shelves that once held tinsel and tree-lights and fat chocolate Santas. She hated Valentine's Day. She hated stacking piles of conversation hearts and roses and plump boxes of elementary-school paper valentines adorned with Charlie Brown or fat, blushing teddy bears. For hours, in-between her shift at the Customer Service desk, Felicity nibbled her cuticles and glared into boxes brimming with stuffed lions and heart-shaped Pez dispensers. She sighed and began stacking crinkled, red-plastic-wrapped Russell Stover boxes onto the shelves, fighting the urge to crush them under her sturdy black boots.

That's why the rubber band had confused her. After all, it was just a rubber band—the fact that it happened to be shaped into an S didn't usher destiny into her life, or promise illicit drugstore trysts in the back of Sam's pharmacy, his eyes dark and relentless, Felicity's hands running along his cropped head of chocolate-dark hair, a sudden kiss. But somehow, the rubber band reminded Felicity to pin her faith on the seemingly-pointless coincidences that happened whenever Sam was near—brief glances, quick smiles, a rapidly-increasing heart rate. It forced Felicity to crane her neck out for love again.

Still, office supplies couldn't tempt fate. She had to be okay with that. Felicity tried not to imagine Sam smiling at her while ringing up his customers, pressing hard amber vials of Allegra and Viacodin and doctor-approved weight-loss capsules into their grateful, grasping hands. Or how something about Sam, his huskiness, his rough, reassuring voice, drew people to him like pigeons to a heated lamp post, eager for warmth.

* * *

The next day, despite herself, Felicity sat back on her stool and listened to the people sweeping in and out of the store. She listened to how their voices ebbed and flowed, loud and resonate and haunting. It wasn't that she enjoyed them, really; they just tuned out the ache in her stomach, its fierce, hollow growls. When this happened, Felicity simply crossed her arms and allowed the voices in: the pitchy voices of six-year-olds whining for gum and Flaming Hot Cheetos, the trench-coated business men who mumbled into sleek black cell phones, the listless sighs of thirty-something women alone in line with their Kotex and chocolate-chunk ice cream. Felicity let her stomach yawn inside of her, imagining the clothes she would wear, the black bras she would buy. After all, a size two couldn't be that far away.

She couldn't believe it had been a year since she first walked into Fern's automatic doors. Still reeling from her breakup with Jeffery and before she controlled her weight, Felicity had been desperate for senseless emotional eating. She had read in some magazine that eating chocolate, for women, recaptured the sense of being in love, flooding the eater with an intense, life-is-good high. That was enough for her. After parking her car into Fern's lot, Felicity had headed straight for the candy aisle, frantically gathering dozens of dark, fragrant chocolate bars into her arms like a woman possessed. Hershey's, Ghirardelli, Godiva, Lindt—she ate them all in the backseat of her parked Volvo, letting their seductive richness seep into her body and start their love-magic.

* * *

The first time she saw Sam, six months ago, Felicity had almost laughed into her Diet Coke.

There, in the corner of his left ear lobe, hung a large diamond solitaire that glistened like sunlight through sea water, shimmering in her eyes. It should have bothered her, but it didn't. *Great*, she thought, *another metro*. Still, the more Felicity watched this brawny stranger, who spoke with a hearty grin and gruff, deep baritone, the more she became intrigued. Dark gray eyes, a husky Irish physique made for boxing and pulling heavy net-fulls of fish from freezing Gloughster waters. His odd, endearing habit of humming Bobby Darin past her counter, a brown-bag lunch of Miracle-Whip turkey sandwich and a banana nestled in his large hands at two-o'clock, Fern's lunch break. Sam had a

punk-rock vibe that sent electric shocks through the grubby drugstore community. The rock-star pharmacist, that's what Laurie, a fellow Fern's employee, called him. Felicity imagined tattoos of dragons and battleships and rough, time-worn roses etched deep into his muscular arms and back, tangled in his thick, curling chest hair.

Once, when she'd breezed past the pharmacy on the way to the bathroom, her stomach throbbing and threatening to throw up her lunch of carrots dipped in Dijon mustard, Sam's eyes met hers in one flawless movement. It was a connection: baited breath, held-in stomach. As they stared at each other, unmoving, for nearly ten seconds, Felicity imagined what it would be like to waltz down the shoe-scuffed aisles in Sam's strong, sure arms, a symphony swirling in her ears as he glided her across the floor like a duchess in a gilded ballroom. She quickly looked away as she fumbled into the ladies room, a hot blush spreading up her neck as she sank to the floor, silently memorizing every stain, each hairline fracture that ran across the scarred linoleum like wisps of fragile gray thunder.

* * *

As she craned her head towards Sam's prescription counter on Wednesday morning, Felicity, rounding-out her nails with a Revlon file, noticed the girl. Bird-boned and scrawny, with sunken-in cheeks slashed with raspberry blush and a mane of layered chestnut hair, the girl adjusted the strap on her straw-colored tube top and stood patiently in Sam's line. The girl smiled with cracked taupe lips as she sauntered to the register, handing Sam a prescription slip she'd fished from the Bebe Sport bag hanging off her elbow. Sam glanced at the prescription once, nodded and, within moments, brought the girl a fat amber vial of what looked like Lipovox. (Felicity herself preferred the "feel good" diet pill, Ephedrasil, since the inventor of Lipovox had been inspired while watching an episode of Oprah, and Felicity hated Oprah.) Then he gently dropped the vial into the girl's claw-like hands, his face clouded with doubt. Felicity knew Sam was trying to avoid staring at the girl's body, how she stood like a lopsided scarecrow, her thin legs wobbly and uncertain. How her stomach caved into her body and forced her to bend forward in an awkward, almost-chic angle. Felicity quickly looked away from Sam's dark gaze, then lunged for a piece of the stolen sugar-free cinnamon Orbit she kept in the top drawer.

Jeffery never gave real compliments. Cute, lovely, put-together, gamine—he called Felicity all those things, but nothing she wore on her body or face could persuade him to raise his flattery to the next level. Doctors didn't call people beautiful. Instead, as he secured his Italian cuff-links and frowned into the cubic-zirconia-encrusted Rolex ticking like a mechanized pulse on his wrist, he told her, without tact or hesitation, how much he disapproved of her weight. "As a doctor," he had said to Felicity, the same night he told her, over oysters and smoked-salmon fettuccini, that marriage was not in his game-plan, "I can honestly say you are at least... oh, I'd say thirty pounds overweight. I mean, look at yourself. Honey, do you want to die?" He reached for Felicity's hand, folding his dry, stubby fingers over hers.

She stood in front of him for what felt like hours. The pomegranate wrap dress, which had seemed so alluring when she'd first admired it in Lane Bryant that afternoon, now seemed to emphasize every unceremonious mound of blubber padded around her legs and hips and thighs, each of the one-hundred-and-eighty pounds that cushioned her squat, five-seven frame.

She wanted to kill herself when he commented on her weight like that, as if she were some five-year old caught with her hand in the Fudgsicle box. As he stared with cool green-blue eyes at the fat that bulged like sea-lion blubber beneath her skin, Felicity gnawed her cuticles and concentrated hard on not crying.

It was Thursday, almost the weekend, and Felicity watched customers pulse into an uneven line at the registers, hover around Sam's pharmacy like impatient vultures waiting for sustenance. Yes, there was Sam in his lab coat, his gray eyes focused on everyone in front of him, smiling as his first customer, an out-of-towner with a frosty blonde shag and NorCal sweatshirt who handed him a fifty in exchange for a fat tube of acne cream. Then it happened: Sam looked up at Felicity, still perched atop her stool. He caught her fluttering gaze like a butterfly in a net, held it. Despite herself, Felicity's heart went wild. It throbbed in her ears. It beat. Warily, she nodded to him, watching Sam smile back at her for a second longer than she'd planned to breathe.

She had not expected eye contact. After all, she barely knew Sam. She barely knew him or what he wanted or who he was. A full minute passed before she finally forced herself from his gaze and stared down at the floor with hard eyes, letting her throbbing chest tune out the crowd's meaningless chatter.

* * *

"Some fun, huh?" Laurie, the twenty-year-old interior design student and wannabe-punk from Iowa, bent down to smile at Felicity as she arranged new shipments for the Hallmark aisle. Like glacial water, Laurie's chirpy voice rushed into Felicity's ears, shocking her into attention. Thank God it was Friday. For almost an hour, Felicity had toyed with dozens of sharp-edged cards covered with hearts and roses and devious, baby-faced cherubs, placing each into its specified area. It was almost frightening, really. By now, she knew all the lines by heart, each witty *entendre*, every tear-inducing avowal of love stamped in swirling ruby ink. She didn't need some twit who relished Victorian locketts and back-to-back episodes of *Trading Spaces* bothering her now. After all, Felicity was a senior employee. Laurie chewed bubblegum and worked in the store's photo shop, laughing at blurry vacation photos and dirty honeymoon snapshots during lunch break.

Now, already fighting the urge to rip each card, methodically, down the middle, Felicity turned to Laurie with a clenched, rigid smile, arching her eyebrow into what she considered a daunting angle. She forced her stomach to stop growling; to stay silent.

"You could say that."

"All this lovey-dovey stuff—I mean, if you want someone, you should just say it, you know?" Laurie chortled, twirling a long mahogany curl around her finger. "Save a buck ninety-five and tell him you love him."

Felicity's breath caught in her throat. "Hm," she finally managed, turning back to the piles of valentines that flowed from the huge cardboard box near her ankles. She willed the blush back from her neck.

"You know, that Sam, he's pretty awesome, isn't he?"

"What?" She froze. In an instant, Felicity pictured the rock-star pharmacist packaging prescriptions the same time she arranged these cards, his gaze trailing along her body like a finger across a cheek.

Tender. She wondered, fleetingly, if he could smell the musk oil she'd dabbed behind her ears on pure whim. After all, she'd accidentally brushed past him today on her way to aisle five, where she had to lead some frazzled house-mom to rows of contact lens solution for her near-sighted second-grader. He could have noticed. Now, faced with Laurie, Felicity concentrated on inhaling and exhaling and not imagining Sam's lips grazing the nape of her neck.

"You know, he's only thirty-five... I mean, how young is that to be a pharmacist? And that stud in his ear?" Laurie made a fanning motion with her right hand, her mouth an astonished O. "I mean, so hot, right?"

Felicity didn't trust herself to answer right away.

"Yeah well, I've got to finish this," she said finally, blocking out Laurie's voice and letting her mind wander. She thought of the rubber band, the S that once sat beneath her stool like a talisman, destined to draw Sam to her waiting, hesitant arms.

* * *

After arranging the cards into their semi-proper places, Felicity let herself eat a small lunch. She drew a can of Diet Coke and a small, hard Yellow Delicious apple—the kind she used to feed Quarter horses during childhood farmyard fieldtrips—from her shoulder bag and stared at how her shirt skimmed the planes of her thinning body. She watched, amazed, as her ribs unfurled against the polyester-blend fabric like intricate wings of bone. It didn't matter what her mom said: ribs were a sign of victory. Evidence. Yes, she could eat meat. She could bring a peanut-butter-and-banana sandwich to lunch instead of the unending plastic bags of string cheese and apples and electric-orange stalks of carrots she munched from her Customer Service stool. But whenever she thought of eating, her mind flew back to the way she felt after a full-half-hour of crunches, how her body folded into itself, becoming a miracle of flesh and breath and bone. Sometimes, she would watch her ribs protract and expand for hours, the bones stretching beneath her skin.

* * *

She didn't know why she'd purchased a bottle of Revlon's Val-

entine, a rich pomegranate shade that had been half-priced all week. Felicity hated chipped nails, and hers always seemed to chip. Still, Valentine was a persuasive color. She would paint some on after her before-dinner shower.

It was five o' clock, the end of her shift, and Felicity's weekend could begin. The sky had turned a crushed-velvet blue, peppered with stars that glistened like pulverized diamonds. The air felt brisk, cooling her cheeks. As Felicity walked the parking lot, she decided to ask Sam to join her for a late-afternoon lunch at Bobo's, the petite French café near the drugstore with live jazz and laughter and swaying stalks of lavender mounded in planters out front. For a second, she pictured Sam's eyes smiling into hers, his hands on her waist. Knowing. She couldn't bring herself to guess how he felt yet—tomorrow would come soon enough.

As she made her way to her Volvo, Felicity also decided that, before she talked to Sam, she would wander over to the heart-rate monitor stationed near the prescription counter and take another free blood pressure test, waiting for her two-o'clock lunch-break to come as she adjusted her auburn ponytail and practiced smiling. She had taken the test countless times in the past. It had become a peculiar, satisfying habit with her—like the way she stole gum and stuck her middle finger, repeatedly, into soft, chubby loafs of Iron Kids Bread, leaving a dent.

* * *

"Hey—I think you're healthy!"

Sam's voice burned through her ears, down into her trembling, visible spine, and Felicity forced herself not to jump from the heart-monitor bench like a panicked rabbit. It was Monday, and she hadn't expected Sam to finish lunch so soon. His lunch bag was already crumpled into a fat brown ball in his right hand, a banana peel flashing yellow from his fist.

"I don't mean to—it's just, you've done that four times now, and I think your arm's gonna collapse."

"Oh!" Felicity rubbed her forearm, dull red and throbbing. She hadn't realized how much she liked how the strap numbed her arm. How it beat out her heartbeats like music. "I just, I wanted to..."

"You must use that thing five times a day," Sam said as he smiled

and raked a hand through his cocoa-dark hair. "What, you got heart problems or something?"

"I—Heart attacks." She hadn't expected that. Still, Felicity's heart swelled as she watched Sam's smile contort into a confused frown, his eyes anxious and questioning.

"... Heart attacks?"

"Yes," she heard herself say. "Spontaneous heart attacks, you know, from rheumatoid arthritis. My dad had it all his life, even died from it—"

"God, I—I'm sorry... ."

"Well you know." Felicity pursed her lips, savoring him. "I stopped smoking and tried to eat better, but still—"

His eyes grew wide. "Is it—that serious?"

She let him wonder if it was, then coughed for good measure. "Yeah, the littlest thing could set it off. Completely unpredictable. Fatal, even. I'm paranoid, but I test my heart at least four times each day, you know, just in case."

"God, I mean—of course." She loved how his voice sounded so broken, irreparable. "If you need anything—?"

"I'll wait in line," she assured him, watching his eyes. As Sam smiled hesitantly and wandered back behind the pharmacy counter, Felicity sighed. She stayed silent as stone as she pressed the green button again and let the monitor squeeze her arm into numbness, prepared to let it predict how long her heart would last.

* * *

He was fifteen minutes late. Stirring a spoon in her wide ceramic mug of Earl Gray with two Sweet-N-Lows, Felicity sighed and ignored how Bobo's smelled so good inside, a blend fresh baguettes and brioche and lavender stalks. She avoided staring at the bounty of pastry cream and dough and butter spread inside the café's thick glass case, checking her cell-phone for missed calls. She didn't understand it. Yesterday, when she'd wandered to Sam's pharmacy counter and asked him if he wanted to meet for lunch at two, he'd smiled and agreed. Felicity almost didn't believe him when he'd nodded yes to her invitation, telling her "Oui, Oui" in an odd, forced-French accent before promptly ringing up some Goth girl's licorice cough drops.

Still, he had agreed to meet her. Yes, Sam's smile had looked

more strained than usual, his lips pulled into a close-mouthed curve. His eyes were harder, distant, and his gaze didn't catch hers from across the drugstore anymore.

Even when she mentioned their date last night before closing, before her final drive home, he'd seemed distracted.

"Right, 2:00 at Bobo's, gotcha," Sam had spouted, concentrating on the cashier box. He sounded edgy but sincere. Willing. Felicity tried to forget all that, focusing instead on the French jazz that pulsed from Bobo's overhead speakers.

The only reason she'd suggested this place was because of him. After all, she hated French stuff. She couldn't stand blond waiters and baguettes and small cast-iron Eiffel Towers perched on each table like imperious, upturned Y's. Still, it was close, and she wanted her first date with Sam to be as effortless as possible. Alone at the square mahogany table, Felicity tuned out the loud, arrogant tocks of the wall clock on Bobo's daffodil-hued walls, AMOR scrawled in swirling French script above the door. She ignored the empty seat her purse saved. Instead, Felicity imagined Sam breezing through the café's glass doors like a dream, drenched in sun and enthusiasm. He would grin away his lateness, clasping his hand to hers and giving her fingers a squeeze. He would insist on buying her a petite green salad with strawberries and walnuts, more tea. He would bring her a French apple tart on a butter-yellow plate. As he sat across from her, nursing a cappuccino, Sam would drink in Felicity's warm, telling gaze across the table. He would hear the tenor of her eyes.

* * *

When she was twenty, before Jeffery and diet pills and Fern's Customer Service Desk, Felicity loved drinking Shirley Temples in the Artemis Room. They were her signature, like red nails or cocktail rings, and she drank them repeatedly, every so often hoisting her glass up to the black-clothed waiters as she grinned and motioned for a refill.

She walked to the Artemis Room from her campus every Wednesday night. She went to soak up atmosphere, to escape classes and wall-clocks and stolid gray sidewalks cluttered with brisk, unsmiling U of I students. Before the divorce, her parents often came here to argue over wine and chicken souvlaki. Felicity made it hers, savoring it: the glow of shell-covered lampshades imported from Crete, the bois-

terous music, waiters who balanced mammoth platters of dolmades and sliced lamb-leg like poised circus performers. She sat at her green-tiled table for hours, saving her fat square of paklava, dripping walnuts and honey, for last as she sipped a second Shirley temple and drank people in.

It wasn't that she was afraid to knock back ouzo with the olive-toned, aging Greek playboys who winked and doled out drunken compliments like Altoids. Even the waiters, grinning at Felicity, told her she was cute enough to forgo ID checks. Still, she resisted. Nestled in a table for two, Felicity relished her Shirley Temples like dark fine wines, savoring the pink fizz of Grenadine and Sprite, her chilled glass, the ice that crunched between her teeth and made her lips numb, how long it took to coax her three cherries, slick-red and succulent with chemical sweetness, to the top of her glass, edging them out with a large silver soup spoon.

* * *

The next morning, a day after she noticed a dark flash of gold glint around Sam's finger like a tarnished halo, Felicity called in sick. She spent her Monday washing down Ephedrasil with Diet Coke, ignoring how the only food in her fridge were carrots, cran-juice, and a single stick of string cheese pushed into the corner like an unwrapped tampon. In the hush of her silent living room, the blinds pulled down, Felicity lay down on the floor. She wore her favorite dirty-violet sweat-suit, worn and familiar and plush as a Spaniel's velveteen snout. She slicked on some Chap Stick. Hand salve. Moisturizer. After stroking the balding velour of her sleeves, Felicity began an extra three-hundred crunches on the hard tear-colored carpet. She was amazed how much it was like breathing. She closed her eyes. With each conscious thrust of her body, Felicity pushed Sam's face farther away, relishing the pure, unbeatable pain that pulsed through her stomach and spine and clenched forearms like a cure. Like magic. Alone on the floor, Felicity savored the deliciousness of laying flat on the carpet as her hands explored the mystery of her pelvis and ribs and sunken-in stomach, the delicate hollow beneath her collarbone.

Leaving Cipriano Pass

Inspired by the Tinajas Atlas Mountains, Arizona

Spanish priests burned brittlebush for incense
but Satan owned this ground when prospectors
bleached to stone on its broiling routes to gold.
Seems they had no 'interpretive trail' out.
You could say thirst is handmaiden to hell.
Creosote burgeons up through their graves now
as if to warn men they too know shortcuts.
Warblers and wild sheep share each other's dust
in beleaguered damp of hollow bedrock
that clutches water like petrified wombs.
They say they were sacred to vanished tribes.
Though my mouth's as dry as cinder cones here,
I don't think I'd boil clean that seething swill—
I'd rather keep my impenitent thirst.
Near dusk, hikers trace lines on tourist maps
of some cartographer's jagged path out.
Their eyes connect the map's route with real ground
as if they were pleading with a closed door.
That route we'll follow till it disappears.

Five O'Clock

At five, we clock out of the world,
passing through poly-plastic portals
and enter the mall, where the dollar
store flickers like a forbidden flame,
and neon hookers, dead lookers
in the fluorescent lights,
appraise the hair products, pubic brushes,
the one-eyed cookie jars.

Monsters glide by, disguised
as leering teenage boys;
pickpockets pucker, pedophiles pause.

The lips of pre-pubescent girls
look strangely sweet yet misshapen;
old men drown on benches, women dream
in fountains, fichus trees bend towards skylights
like women suckling babies, two to each breast.

Inside the shops, anything can be exchanged:
fresh faces despised, worn faces displayed,
manikins replaced, mankind, womankind *redux*,
while outside history has stopped;
headlines proclaim the end
of linear time; still we shop,
dreading the hours that pass
and the long familiar ride homeward.

Frankenstein

In October, after I've already started the fourth grade, my father gets orders to Honolulu. Amber and I aren't very happy about leaving. After the move, Amber goes to school for one week before she tells our parents she's not going back to first grade.

At first, my parents think it's a game or early rebellion, like she's getting them back for moving us away from our friends and family, but the truth is Amber reinvents herself everywhere we go. She can be a different person in the same afternoon, from the sandbox to the monkey bars. That's just Amber. It isn't about the move—it's about something else.

Our parents coax her, bribe her and threaten her but nothing works. She sits at the kitchen table reading the back of the Lucky Charms cereal box while I hurriedly finish math homework.

"Jessica," our mother says. "I asked you last night if you had finished all your homework."

I told her that I thought I had finished it, but I had forgot about a worksheet Mr. Nakada gave us yesterday afternoon.

She gives me the look but finishes loading the dishwasher.

Amber is quiet these days. Sometimes it's nice, like now, when she isn't whining or poking at me. But I worry about her. She is my little sister after all and I'm supposed to look after her. After she refused to go to school, I asked her what happened, why she wouldn't go back, but she told me to go suck an egg. Now, she stays at home with our mother and watches *Joker's Wild* and *the Price is Right*. At night when the jet airplanes don't fly overhead, but the mosquitoes buzz at the window screens to get in, my parents speculate about what's wrong with Amber. My mother checks out library books on parenting that are strewn over the house. She reads four at a time to cross-reference with other books and the other mothers that congregate in the courtyard.

Our housing complex is one big U. The duplexes complete the bottom and sides of the U with a long strip of carport at the top. No one has a garage. My father put his tools on the enclosed lanai. Most of the kids in our housing area are younger than me. I've made one friend,

Marjorie, but she is in the fifth grade so I only see her sometimes at recess.

I have a crush on Eddie Piccolo who sits two desks away from me. At the class Halloween party I come dressed as a gypsy. I walk around the classroom set up like a mini haunted house, without the blood and eerie music, and bob for apples. We put our hands into bags to feel brains and guts. It's supposed to be scary but I've done it before and know it's just spaghetti, but I make squirmy faces so Lindsey Kirkpatrick's mother feels like she's doing her room-mother job.

Eddie Piccolo dresses as a vampire and talks to Kiki Desmond and Stacey Rump. Kiki's mother is our Brownie Troop leader and Stacey's mom is a secretary. Kiki is cuter than me but Stacey wears thick glasses and has buck teeth. I think Kiki and I could be best friends if her and Joanna Rama weren't.

"I saw them shopping at Ala Moana," Stacey says. "Her sister was there, too."

I ask who and they point at Lindsey Kirkpatrick and her mother.

"Her sister looked funny and she drooled a lot," Stacey says. "She just followed them like, like this." Stacey imitates Frankenstein, logging along in his lead boots.

I laugh, not because I can visualize Lindsey's sister but because Stacey actually drools during her impersonation. Eddie Piccolo, who's been quiet but stares at me while Stacey talks, says it's because she's a retard. Eddie starts impersonating Lindsey's sister, even though I'm sure he's never seen her before, and we girls laugh. I'm laughing harder than I should to impress Eddie.

Kiki has to go to the bathroom so we all go. They really like my costume and I start to think that living in Hawaii isn't so bad. No one had to use the bathroom since once we're there in the coolness of the blue stalls and dripping sinks, Stacey asks me whether I like Eddie Piccolo.

"She does," Kiki says.

"I don't," I say.

"You can tell," Kiki says. "You try to touch him when you stand next to him. I have older sisters. That's what they say you do."

"I don't," I say again.

"You can tell us," Stacey says. But I'm not sure I can.

I change the subject and ask Stacey about Lindsey's sister again,

what she really looked like while shopping, and Stacey does Frankenstein. Kiki and I laugh, I hold my stomach, and then I do Frankenstein while rolling my eyes repeating, I'm a retard, I'm Lindsey's retard sister, over and over again. And it seems to have worked getting us off the topic of Eddie Piccolo. But when a toilet flushes, Kiki and Stacey stop laughing. Lindsey exits the stall wearing her white and maroon cheerleading outfit and looking like Barbie. Lindsey seems to take a long time washing her hands. I feel sick. She walks over to us. Lindsey is a sixth grader. Her skirt swishes across her smooth legs. My mother says I can't shave until I'm in junior high.

I tense up in case Lindsey decides to hit me. I've heard about girls who get in fights in the bathroom. I just pray she doesn't hit me in the face. But she just laughs and slides her finger across her throat in a slicing motion and points to me. Kiki coughs.

"Better watch out, girls," Lindsey says. She lets the bathroom door slam behind her. My mind races. I could just say I'm sorry. Maybe Lindsey would understand. I could tell her about Amber and how she's crazy, which would be a little exaggerated, but then maybe Lindsey would understand. Or I could tell her I had a crush on Eddie Piccolo and maybe then she wouldn't punch me. But then, I think I would punch me so how do I avoid getting punched and worse, punched in the face?

"My sister is weird," I blurt out. Kiki and Stacey stare at me.

"I mean, she's practically retarded," I say. "She stays at home during the day, eating cereal, and she won't go to school. Lindsey and I are alike, she'll see we're alike."

I'm trying to convince myself, but I know that Lindsey won't see it my way so I'll just stay at home with Amber. If she's allowed to stay home and won't give a good reason, and I talk to my mother and have a good reason, then she has to agree to let me stay home. But I can't tell her that I was making fun of someone less fortunate than me. My mother has a thing for the less fortunate. So I think I'll have to transfer schools.

"There's St. John the Baptist," Kiki says. Her brother plays football there.

"I'm not Catholic," I say.

Kiki says that's okay—they take all kinds of sinners.

For the rest of the afternoon, I can't concentrate on Mr. Nakada and the lesson on turning decimals into fractions and then back again.

I stare at the clock and wonder if Lindsey will corner me after school. After the bell rings I gather my books, leaving the light jacket I brought and my lunchbox in the coat closet, hurry into the hallway, out the main doors, and across the street. Kiki runs after me, but I don't slow down. She gives up after three blocks and lets me go.

My mother and Amber are playing Candyland when I get home. I run straight to my room and flinch every time the phone rings, thinking that it will be Mrs. Kirkpatrick on the other line telling my mother what a horrible daughter I am and how I made fun of their retarded daughter, not Lindsey, but the other one.

The next day I fake a stomachache. My mother asks if I've thrown up, feels my head for a fever and makes me stick out my tongue, but we both know she's only humoring me. My father has already left for work so I can't appeal to him and Amber sticks out her tongue and kicks me in the shin.

"Is she adopted?" I ask, but my mother has already disappeared to get my lunch.

I avoid everyone at school for the rest of the week. I don't drink anything so I don't have to go to the bathroom during school hours and Lindsey can't corner me in a dark stall and pummel my face. I tell kids I don't know that my sister is retarded like Lindsey's. In class I get in trouble for whispering about how weird Amber is and that sometimes I wish she wasn't my sister but then I feel okay because that's how Lindsey must feel about her sister.

I avoid Kiki and Stacey at recess and I sit behind the stairs at lunch, eating, watching feet shuffle up and down through the open slats. Shoes are interesting. Bridget and Arini have new Mary Jane's with lace trim on their socks. Christine, Michaela and Elizabeth have too big, hand-me-down shoes. The moms say not to worry, they'll grow into them. The boys mostly wear scuffed sneakers, some without socks or mismatched. Mike Perkins' black sneakers have a hole over the big toe but he has home problems. His mom usually sits in the courtyard with the other mothers. I learn a lot from sneaking out of bed, in socked feet, stepping over Amber's toys, missing the creak on the floor to the right, near the bathroom, and listening at my parents' door.

Over the next couple weeks, I complain of a stomachache and ask to stay home. My mother doesn't listen, so I leave every day like I'm going to school, but in the next housing complex I slip into Marjorie's backyard and spend the day on her empty back patio. Both of Marjo-

rie's parents work. I spread out the blanket I've stashed in the seat of her brother's Mega Big Wheel and I read Nancy Drew or *Charlotte's Web* or *Black Beauty* or *Little Women*. I eat my lunch at eleven, right on school schedule, and I take a small nap afterwards like the first graders. Around one, I walk out into the yard and do one hundred jumping jacks and fifty sit-ups. I'm the strongest girl in the fourth grade. I run in circles, until I'm out of breath, and then go back to the shade of the patio and read.

The school sends home letters, but Amber's paid a quarter to intercept anything that comes through with the school logo in the envelope corner. I don't know how she does it without our mother catching her. She just does. I don't ask. But the week before Thanksgiving my mother asks to see my standardized test results.

"I don't know where I put them," I say. "I'll look for them."

"Jessica, they were handed out last week."

I shuffle. Amber sits at the kitchen table eating Frosted Flakes. She's waiting. I know her brain is thinking up some story if I out her as my accomplice. Amber's smart like that. She's smarter than any other kid in the first grade. Sometimes I think she's smarter than me.

"Jessica."

"I don't know," I say. "I'll look for them."

"Did you not do well on the math and science parts?"

"Can I watch TV?"

She waves me off but I know she won't forget about the scores. I don't know what to do. I have been out of school for three weeks. Amber's intercepted two letters. They inquire about my health and request my mother call the school to set up an appointment with Mrs. Steele, the guidance counselor.

I go back to school the next day, thinking I'll slip back into the classroom, like I'd never been gone. When the first bell rings, Mr. Nakada asks to see me outside where Mrs. Steele is waiting.

"Jessica," Mrs. Steele says. "How have you been?"

None of the kids like Mrs. Steele. I'm not sure any of the adults do either. She's a beaknosed woman who looks like the Wicked Witch of the West, minus the green paint. She smells like the Vicks jelly my mother rubs on my chest when I have a cold. Mrs. Steele wears polyester pants pulled up under her chest with elastic waistbands covered in dog fur.

"Sick," I say.

"Did your mother get our correspondence?"

Lindsey Kirkpatrick, the fluorescent hall monitor band wrapped around her arm, walks down the hall while I think about what to say. Lindsey's hair is perfectly French braided and she wears a tight, white polo shirt with a little alligator on the front. Her plaid skirt touches the tops of her white knee socks. It's a skirt I asked for the last time my mother and I went shopping, and she said it was too short and too expensive.

"You're back," Lindsey says to me. She smiles with perfectly straight teeth, like we're best friends, like she invites me to her house for sleepovers where we talk about boys and hide the bras of the first to fall asleep in the freezer.

"Letters?" I say. When the adults aren't looking, Lindsey draws her finger across her throat and points at me.

"Letters?" I say, again.

They take me to the office and I think about running away but what good would that do? Where would I go? I can't live on Marjorie's back patio and I only have thirty-five cents in my pocket. So I sit in the office, in a hard plastic chair with a jagged crack through the seat, while Mrs. Steele pulls my file.

When my mother marches into the guidance counselor's office with Amber in tow, she doesn't say a word to me. She looks at my swinging legs, so I stop, trying not to give the impression I'm enjoying myself. My feet dangle above the linoleum floor. Amber sits next to me instead of following our mother into the office. Before they close the door, my mother says something about the adjustment to the move. I bite at the skin around my nails.

"You're in trouble," Amber says.

"Tell me something I don't know, toilet face."

Amber doesn't really have a toilet face. She's already prettier than me. I know that she'll be the pretty one and I'll be the smart one, or the athletic one, or the musical one, which really means my father won't need to set a dating age for me because all the boys will ask Amber out because she's blond and thin and I know she's only seven but it's something that isn't going away. I sense that about her. She looks cute in her new shorts and Big Bird t-shirt. I look like a mini-librarian in a brown corduroy skirt and pink shirt with bows where buttons should be. I have freckles and Amber has smooth brown Syrian skin. My red hair is in two braids, so at least I look like Laura Ingalls, not

Pippi Longstocking.

"Did you tell her about the letters?" I ask.

Amber shakes her head. "But she'll find out."

My mother doesn't say anything to me on the ride home. We pull away from the school slowly in the '72 Volkswagen with the knob-by stick shift. She looks over her shoulder four times and in the rear-view mirror twice before she leaves the curb. At the first stoplight, a dog humps another behind a chain link fence. I want to laugh, but then my mother will question my understanding of the seriousness of the incident. I know because I know my mother. The stoplight is long and I can't take my eyes off the humping dogs. We had a poodle that went around humping our legs before my father took it to the pound. Amber and I would laugh while our mother's face turned red. I pretend the dogs are friends and that they live together, so it seems alright that the silver terrier is on top of the ugly one.

I'm sent to my room when we get home. My mother says she doesn't want to see or hear me. I should think about what I've done. But the only thing I can think about stretched out on my canopy bed is the two dogs humping each other, which makes me think about the dog we used to have and that I can't remember his name.

When my father gets home from work I slip from my room to the top of the stairs. My father sounds tired. He says this is the last thing he wants to deal with when he gets home. My mother says I've missed the standardized tests and my father says he doesn't give a rat's ass about standardized tests but he can't have two kids out of school, so she's going to have to fix things.

Over the weekend, our parents take us to the Arizona Memorial where we ride a boat to the sunken ship. Tourists trace the names of lost sailors and place wreaths on the oil slicked water. I think about the people who are trapped below, even though there is nothing left of them after forty-three years.

My parents stand by the railing but they don't talk to each other. Amber twirls around the deck of the ship. She makes full turns one way and then the other. She insisted on wearing a sundress with a full skirt and it's obvious that she likes the way the skirt flutters when she twirls. An old man wearing a black beret tucks a red carnation behind Amber's ear and she smiles at him. Amber never smiles at strangers.

On Monday morning my mother escorts me to school. She leaves Amber with one of the other stay at home moms. We meet with

the principal and I sign a pledge that I'll come to school and catch up with the work I missed while I was out, even if it means staying after school. The principal schedules a Saturday standardized test make-up with me and Mr. Nakada. I take the test and things return to normal. I make sure I'm always with Kiki and Stacey, especially when I use the bathroom. I'm not sure it will keep Lindsey from beating me up, but it's worth a try.

The first of December, our father goes TDY to Omaha. Our mother takes out the atlas pointing to Nebraska, right in the middle. Amber runs her finger from Oahu to Nebraska over and over again, her finger sticky with strawberry jelly. TDY means my father goes alone, to school, for six weeks. He tells Amber and me to behave for our mother and he'll bring us back presents.

"Especially you." He points to me.

After my father leaves, my standardized tests results arrive in the mail. Mrs. Steele calls my mother to set up another appointment and I'm transferred to the fifth grade. Now I'm in the same grade with Marjorie. I try to sit next to her but Mr. Otto sits his class in alphabetical order and my C isn't near her S. She avoids me, probably because Lindsey is out to get me. My name is written on the bathroom stalls under the word "die." There are rumors she's going to beat me up on Friday. I consider not coming to school but then remember what my father said before he left for Omaha.

Parts of fifth grade aren't hard, like language arts and history, and I had been doing okay in fourth grade math, but fifth grade math is really hard and I miss assignments.

Amber starts seeing a therapist twice a week, consuming our mother's attention, and she stops asking about school. I think she's just proud that I'm smart enough to skip a grade. But after a week of no math homework my mother's called into the office. Mrs. Steele pulls my file and her words *permanent record* reverberate in my head. Until moving to Hawaii I had never been called to the principal's or the guidance counselor's office. My mother never had to come to school except for regular parent-teacher conferences where she received a glowing report.

When my mother and Amber arrive at the school, Amber hands me a raspberry flavored dum-dum.

"What did you talk about today," I ask Amber. I want my own therapist.

"Stuff." Amber sucks on a key lime flavored dum-dum.

"What kind of stuff?"

"We play Boggle."

"You suck," I say. A word my mother has asked me not to use. I punch Amber in the leg. But she just licks her sucker. "I wish you hadn't been born," I say. Amber stops licking her sucker then. And there's this little part of me that feels bad, but I try and push it down and fill it back up with mad.

"I think you understand when children aren't getting enough attention," Mrs. Steele says when the door opens.

My mother motions for Amber and I to follow.

Two stoplights from home, at the start of the military housing we live in with cinderblock facades painted like the mints at my cousin's wedding, she asks why I wasn't doing my math homework. My mother's nose twitches and I think of *Bewitched* and wish Tabitha, with her long blond hair and skinny body, was my mother. I try twitching my nose, but nothing happens.

"I don't understand why you wouldn't talk to her. That's her job to ask about your feelings, she's the guidance counselor." My mother does this heavy sigh that means she's exasperated more than angry.

Amber's quiet in the backseat, but I'm still hating her, so it's good she isn't talking.

"Jessie," my mother says. "It doesn't do any good to skip a grade then get held back. Is that what you want? How would that look?" Then she yells at a stalled brown station wagon blocking our lane.

Riding in this old car, I hate myself for being smart enough to get into the fifth grade and then hate myself for being so dumb at math. Barbie doesn't need math with her straight blond hair, hundreds of outfits and a Corvette and Ken. I hate Mr. Otto and Eddie Piccolo because if I hadn't liked him I would never have made fun of Lindsey's sister. Right now, right here in the car, I wish for a horrible disease, one that no one's heard of yet, and right here, I'd die, and everyone would be sorry.

"What did she ask you, Jessie? What did you tell her?" my mother asks.

"Nothing," I say.

My mother tells me she doesn't want to be called to Mrs. Steele's office again.

The next day after school Lindsey Kirkpatrick corners me on

the playground and I think finally it's over and I'm a little relieved. Because I hope it will be like the dentist, over in a few minutes, a little pain, maybe a little blood. I don't know. I'm not sure what happens when girls fight.

The kids gather on the track cheering, "Fight, Fight." Lindsey makes the kids stay on the running track while we walk to the center of the field. The grass has just been cut and pieces of it stick to my shoes, wet from the puddles on the track. Lindsey has her arm around my shoulders. I start to sweat.

"You know I have to punch you," she says.

I nod, my mouth dry. I've never been punched.

"You shouldn't have made fun of my sister." Lindsey sounds calm, like she's been rehearsing this for weeks and maybe she has. The kids yelling fight, fight fade and it's just me and her standing in the grass. Lindsey's hair brushes my shoulder; it smells like strawberry frosting.

"We could of been friends," she says. We stop and face each other.

"Don't hit me in the face," I say.

She laughs and tosses her hair over her shoulder. She cracks her knuckles on each hand, as if aware the whole school is watching her.

"I have to hit you in the face," she says. "But just be glad I don't have brothers. I punch like a girl."

And she punches me in the face. More below the eye, but the tiny dolphin ring she wears makes a little cut near my hairline and it burns for a long time after she's walked away. But it's okay because if she had made fun of Amber, I would have had to punch her, too. I try not to cry, but it doesn't work. It doesn't matter; the kids scatter from the track suspecting a lurking teacher.

I try to pretend I'm at home eating cereal with Amber or riding the Ferris wheel or riding on a big parade float wearing a crystal crown. But this fails, too.

The school looks smaller from the field. The palm trees, heavy with coconuts, shade the foursquare court and jungle gym. I lie down, my nose in the fresh cut grass, my arms spread out wide. Pieces stick to my face and my elbows. I close my eyes. My cheek cools against the earth.

Conjurer

If absence feeds the heart, I survive
my hunger by a litany of names
repeated in a dark room.

Every day another gap in the wall
that death comes through, one more stone
dislodged. Yesterday, before

the *God-be-with-you* of goodbye,
my teacher-artist-friend died.
When I found out, I raged and wept,

pounded fists on the kitchen table.
For all the good that did either of us.
The list of my dead grows long.

I am becoming adept at sorcery,
a conjurer of names and faces,
absences by which I survive.

The New Idolaters

O Great High Definition Screen, save us
with analysis, images, commentary.
Refresh us with sound bites and summary,
shield us with euphemisms, keep us from
real blood in real emergency rooms.

Hold us transfixed in our dark houses,
tuned into cartoons and romance,
game shows and ebullient preachers,
non-stop advertising with no
mention of hidden charges.

Teach us to channel-surf, remind us
that the *Mute* eliminates gunfire
and screams from the rubble,
the convulsive weeping of strangers.

Forgive us for asking who we will be when
the shadows die back into snow on the screen
and there are no replacement parts,
when power runs out like oil in the sand
and our missiles turn again and rend us.

O Most Holy Television, rescue us
when the laugh-track ends, when
honest words are the only currency we have,
and we don't remember how to use them.

A Moment of Many Moments in a Large City

I hit a homeless man with my car. Not very hard, but I *hit*, you know, like another *human being*. The sound of an accident is so original. So out of place with every other sound happening at that same moment. I turn around to see him. Looking the other way had been the reason I hit him. He's spinning and falling down in my rearview mirror. It crosses my mind to drive off, but I pull over. I get out of the car. He gets up off the ground. We walk to each other.

The city swarms around us, sirens from fire trucks and police cars ring in the distance. Breaks, horns, and the general sound of cars squeal and hum around us. The sound of LA.

Christ, at least I didn't kill him. He's alive. He's moving okay too. Look, he's walking, got a good stride in him, a little limp. Maybe an act. Then again he did get hit by a car.

"Hey, you okay?" Pointing to his feet.

"My wheels, my wheels, you hit my wheels."

What? He's walking. What wheels? Those are feet.

"So... you okay?"

Indescribable mumbling. He's looking to the sky and shaking his hands.

"Why'd you do this to me? My wheels, what'd you do to my wheels?"

Jesus Christ. Does he want money? I don't have any on me. I can give him some from Singapore. I was just there. Maybe he will go there soon too. I can't give him anything.

"What did I do to deserve this? I was just walking..."

"I didn't see you. There was that accident that almost happened in the intersection. You know, not ours, the other one."

This is true. Before I turned the corner, an accident almost happened in front of me and since traffic was stopped, I thought, being the smart-ass twenty-something I am, "LA drivers," and I would take advantage of their poor decision making. But I hit another person. Not

even someone who deserved hitting. Maybe if I could've hit a guy who just cheated on his wife or some guy running from robbing a store, or Jim Carrey, or something—something heroic to turn this whole thing around. No, I hit this guy, and I can't understand a goddamn thing he's saying.

He takes off his tattered shoes.

"Ohhh, my toes."

The toes wiggle, the socks are dirty, but no holes. I can never say enough about a good pair of socks. The comfort, unparalleled.

At least we're talking about what we're pointing at now. AND they're moving. Good stuff.

He looks at me with puppy-dog eyes.

"What are you gonna do about this? They really hurt."

I don't have anything. I have to pick up Leyna in a couple of minutes. Does he need a hospital? I guess he can ride in the back, Leyna will wonder who he is. We could take him to the bar with all the other people we are going to see. Get him a nametag, see if he wants to network with people in the "business."

"Why don't you walk around a little bit for me. Let's see if you're okay." He walks a very small circle in front of me. That's our diagnosis, a test, if you will, to assess me *hitting* him with a car.

"Well, you're walking okay."

"But my toes, what are you going to do about them?"

"Do you want some water, I have some water in the back of my car."

"No. Yes. I want the water."

"Okay. Hold on."

Oh nice, the water is cold, I bet that'll taste good to him. Calm him down.

I hand him the bottle of water. Blankly, he grabs it, opens it, and pours it on his feet. His socks are now soaking wet.

"That feels better. They feel better."

The wet toes wiggle vigorously.

"Yeah, that feel good? You're not thirsty?"

"No."

"Alright," I shrug.

"Okay, thanks."

"Yeah, sure."

He sits down on the curb. He's the most tired man I have seen. Aged by the street and sun. He rests against the chain-link fence, and looks skyward. I look up at the towers of glass and metal around us, the sun reflects nicely. People, walking, pass between us. I hand him his shoes. He puts them on and struggles to rise. He's on his feet. He leaves without a word. I stand and watch him cross the intersection he attempted to a few minutes before.

The imprint of his wet feet stand before me, still.

Let's Change Reality, Okay?

Moon, don't wane
like my uncle did of Parkinson's,
shrinking to a slaving
smile. Don't wax
like my sister's mind, a piñata strewing
coins for psychiatrists. Enough
of cycles—all is gone to all
is well, is gone, is well, is gone.
You stay full.

Momentous and Ill-Advised Proceedings: 139 Years of the *santa clara review*

"On sending forth this magazine to the public, we, the printers and contributors, would like to say a few words explanatory of so momentous and perhaps ill-advised proceeding."

— Idle Notes, *The Owl*, Vol. 1 Number 1, 1869

In America, a country founded in revolution and desire for change, it sometimes seems impossible that a publication—especially a literary magazine—could survive for over a hundred years. And it sometimes seems even more impossible—in an age of television, the internet, and youtube—that it can still continue. However, miracles and wonders do happen, and the *santa clara review* is finishing its 139th year of publication with no signs of stopping.

As a whole, literary magazines first began to appear in America in the early 1800s. The oldest literary magazines in the country, the *North American Review* and the *Yale Review*, were founded in 1815 and 1819 respectively.

In 1869, a group of college boys, including Charles Wilcox and James Campbell, at Santa Clara College (what is now Santa Clara University), brought the literary magazine to the West coast. They called the publication *The Owl*. In their first Editors' Note, the young men said the name was chosen because they thought they were like owls, "conning our books of lore in the night."

"We ask the whole state your hearty support. Ours is the only college paper on the coast, and while almost hundreds are upheld in the East, it would not very well become you to see this one wither, when scarcely out of germ. We are going to be like cactus... strong and sturdy, determined to live, wearing even the longest, driest season, without even showing a wrinkle; bearing a fruit which, if the rind be torn away, is not unrefreshing."

— Idle Notes, *The Owl*, Vol. 1
Number 2, 1869

According to archive records, *The Owl* was the first college-run literary magazine in the West. This earliest incarnation of *The Owl* ran for many years, achieving the founders' goals of "mental improvement" and literary activity.

The magazine stopped publication briefly in the last throws of the 1800s, before resurfacing again in 1903 as *The Redwood*.¹ This version of Santa Clara University's literary magazine included many poems pertaining to World War I, as well as non-fiction articles such as "Catholic Education and the World War." *The Redwood* ceased publication in 1918.

For years, it seemed as if Santa Clara University no longer wanted or needed a literary magazine. The yearbook (*The Redwood*) and newspaper (*The Santa Clara*) were outlets for students interested in journalism, and if there was a cry for a more literary or creative outlet, it was a quiet one.

However, in 1931, a group of students revived Santa Clara's literary magazine, once again calling it *The Owl*. This new version of *The Owl* was a large, 13-inch high and 10-inch wide pamphlet which was advertised as "A Literary Supplement to *The Santa Clara*."

"We fear perhaps that in the year 2000 A.D., *The Owl* editor, in a frantic search for editorial material will pick up this issue, scan it, and sit down in judgement..."

— *The Owl*, "Editorial," 1931

founder (and new editor) James Pike wrote in his editorial essay "We're Back": "In order that it may have all the due protection while it is being nourished back to life, it has been deemed advisable that [*The Owl*] remain attached to *The Santa Clara* until it can be launched on a safe financial status."

Because of the strong campus support and interest, *The Owl* became its own publication again in 1938. Looking suspiciously like an issue of a ladies' housekeeping magazine, complete with Chesterfield cigarette ads on the back cover, *The Owl* released a short issue (typically five poems, essays, or stories) every month. The front covers were standard, monochrome, and changed very little in the next twenty years.

In 1953, *The Owl* started to mutate into the magazine that we know today. It shifted from a monthly to a quarterly publication, and

1. This is not to be confused with Santa Clara University's yearbook *The Redwood*, which was founded in 1923.

original artwork began appearing on the covers. (Typically this artwork featured cartoonish owls in a variety of situations—playing football, drinking martinis, or, in one case, flying into outer-space). When the magazine's first Art Editor was hired in 1954, more expressive, colorful, and owl-less images began plastering the pages of SCU's literary magazine.

As time flew through the late fifties and into the sixties, readers could expect anything from *The Owl*. Each issue was a different size, shape, and color. There was no consistent template or style—one issue was printed on green paper, another

“When I look back on my time spent at the *review*, the best things were always the people... We were a team and a family of friends that I will never forget.”

**— ben swanson, editor-in-chief
2005-06, fiction editor 2004-05**

had each cover hand-personalized by the magazine's staff. As the political and social environment of the 60s and 70s became crazier and crazier, so did the style and content of the literary magazine.

It is no surprise that, just as social movements have backlashes, so do styles of publication. The 1980s saw a new slim, sleek format emerge for *The Owl*. Looking much more like a table-top magazine, this 8 ½ by 11 inch journal featured a constant pattern of style and content. However, many students and staff-members found the style too low-brow and juvenile. The name of the magazine was also becoming a problem—the inside-joke of the 1860s no longer felt relevant to the contemporary college-students. John Dowden (Editor-in-chief 1988-89, Production Editor 1987-88) explained:

In 1985, the magazine still... looked more like a flyer than a literary journal. In 1987-8, Kevin O'Neill [Editor-in-Chief], Jerry Sherman [Associate Editor], and I worked to give the magazine a facelift. That was the year that the smaller, book-like format came into being... [But] although the format change did give the magazine a more professional feel, the name still hung around like an albatross (excuse the poor bird metaphor). The two biggest problems with *The Owl* as the name of the magazine were that it had no clear connection with Santa Clara University and wasn't taken seriously as a place to want to be published by the wider community.

"What I remember most was the incredibly painful and laborious process of pasting the pages of the magazine onto the production boards and then, exacto knife and hot glue roller in hand... making corrections when the galleys came back from the publisher. We had one computer in the office; laptops were still a dream."

— john scardamaglia, production editor 1988-89

So, armed with a new look and format, *The Owl* officially became the *Santa Clara Review* in 1989.

Over the next few decades of SCR's publication life, there would be a series of re-designs and changes. Artwork for the covers became larger and more complex in the mid-nineties. The title was also officially changed to its signature lower-case font in 1994.

The change that has had the most recent effect on the *santa clara review* is the template change, which just occurred last year. Mike Gustie and Ben Swanson (Associate Editor and Editor respectively) started planning a major stylistic change for the *santa clara review* from the beginnings of their time on the magazine. Swanson joked that the magazine had "gone through puberty," leaving it smaller, more stylish, and full of "fonts in strange places." A new logo—the typewriter/lightening-bolt—also emerged, decorating the back of magazine covers, tee-shirts, advertisements, and even computer desktops.

"What travails we endured... Past our bedtimes, messing around with image boxes and endless galleys. On the phone, running damage control whenever deadlines were ignored. But all was not lost; the magazine always came out on time."

— mike gustie, associate editor 2005-06, poetry editor 2004-05, production editor 2003-04

This is where you find the magazine now. And who knows what the future will bring? This publication has been through multi-generational staff changes, name changes, several wars, and even an occasional lawsuit (November 1983). But one thing is for sure—Santa Clara University's literary magazine is certainly a survivor, and we're here for the long-haul.

Contributors' Notes

jeffery c. alfier lives in Schwedelback, Germany. His publication credits include *Concho River Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Freshwater*, *Georgetown Review*, *Mangrove Review*, and *santa clara review*. He is author of a chapbook of poems, *Strangers Within the Gate* (The Moon Publishing, 2005).

amy marie baldwin lives in the great north woods of Minnesota where she bakes bread, runs with her part-time hound dog, Hank, and measures the snow outside her door with a yardstick. She is originally from Iowa, and gladly claims her "flat-lander" status.

richard boada is a PhD candidate in creative writing at the University of Southern Mississippi. Born in Quito, Ecuador he grew up in southern California. Most recently lived in Louisville, Kentucky, where he received his BA in English from Bellarmine University and MA in English from the University of Louisville. His poems have been published in *Ariel*, *LEO*, *Product*, *Limestone*, *The Louisville Review* and *Poetry East*.

jennifer bryan currently attends Bowling Green State University's MFA program, and is an assistant editor for *Mid-American Review*. She received her BA in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her fiction has appeared in *The Madison Review* and *Millennium*.

patrick carrington teaches creative writing in New Jersey, and is the poetry editor for the art/literary journal *Mannequin Envy* (www.mannequinenvy.com). His manuscript *Thirst* just won the Codhill Press's 2006 Poetry Chapbook Award and will be out in 2007. He also has forthcoming poetry in *The Connecticut Review*, *The Potomac Review*, *Rattle*, *The Evansville Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *The Pacific Review*, *Quercus Review*, and several other journals. His first book-length collection, *Rise, Fall, and Acceptance* was released in December, 2006 by Main St. Rag.

angie chau was born in Vietnam and has since lived on three continents and an island. She graduated with a master's degree in creative writing from University of California Davis, where she also taught undergraduate fiction and was the fiction editor for *The Greenbelt Review*. She has been nominated as a Ploughshares Emerging Writer. One story received a nomination to *Best New American Voices*. She is a Hedgebrook alum and has recently been awarded a Macondo Residency. Her work has appeared in the *Indiana Review*, *Slant*, *Face America*, and *Du-Am*. A new story is set to appear in the anthology *Cheers to Musis: Contemporary Works by Asian American Women*. She now lives in Berkeley and can be contacted at angechau@hotmail.com

mark clevenger '86 was editor of *santa clara review* during the 1985-86 academic year. He teaches fiction writing at Menlo School in Atherton, California.

megan cutler always loved the sound of pen on paper and the feel of thoughts flowing effortlessly and always found that words tended to be inadequate. She often spends her days alone with a cup of coffee and a crisp journal. Writings are later turned into bold and emotional paintings to the background of aggressive music. A detail oriented perfectionist. A previous graphic designer. Clean and organized until acrylic is beaten onto canvas. Her paintings are overwhelming, demanding and destroy stereotypes of the female artist.

ross dakin is the 2006-07 production editor of the *santa clara review* and guarantees this issue to be free of all format and spellign errors. Ross has cherished his tenure at the *review*, during which he drew inspiration from the "beautiful truth," as identified by Walt Whitman, "that all men contain something of the artist in them. And perhaps it is the case that the greatest artists live and die, the world and themselves alike ignorant what they possess." Ross took the photograph *No Fishing* (p. 68) on the west coast of the Fijian island Viti Levu. This symbol reserves the surrounding fish for the nearby villagers of Malevu koro.

caitlin dyer composes, collages, and creates under the name Edward F. Edward. EFE's portfolio is currently located at www.dearedward.com, and, as usual, edward can be reached at caitlindyer@gmail.com.

chad eschman is a theater major and a creative writing minor at Santa Clara University. More of his works can be found at eschman.org

kellie flint is a philosophy and studio art major, religious studies minor at Santa Clara University. She hopes to someday work in her own gallery. She loves kittens, lights, good books, music, and people.

don fritz is a professor in the Art Department at Santa Clara University.

katherine harper is a senior at Santa Clara University, graduating in June with a degree in studio art and art history. She is from Santa Cruz, California and plans on pursuing a graduate degree in studio art/photography.

kristen jaber is a senior communication major at Santa Clara University.

lauren karp is the 2006-07 Editor of the *santa clara review*. She has enjoyed putting together this issue, especially the "Special Insert," as it meant she was able to spend hours with the archives, read magazines from the 1870s and 1930s, and somehow still call it work. She is sad to be leaving SCR, but is happy to leave her stamp on the magazine's history. She will be pursuing an MA in literature at Oregon State University in the fall.

jon killoran is a junior English major at Santa Clara University

gareth lee took his MFA at Brown University. His work has appeared (or is forthcoming) in *Columbia*, *Denver Quarterly*, *First Intensity*, *Green Mountains Review*, *GutCult*, *POOL*, and elsewhere. He lives in New Jersey.

jeanne lohmann has work published in various journals and anthologies, and has also been published before in the *santa clara review*. Her new collection of poetry, *Calls from a Lighted House*, will be published in fall 2007. Her most recent book of prose is *Daaaancing in the Kitchen*.

james lower is currently seeking his MFA in fiction writing from Columbia College Chicago.

kelsey maher is a sophomore English major at Santa Clara University.

michael minassian is a professor at Broward Community College in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. In addition to his MA, Michael has a certificate in creative writing from California State University (Dominguez Hills) and has done post-graduate work at Cambridge University in the U.K. In 1997, he was named best poet by *City Link* magazine. His award winning poetry and short stories have appeared in such journals as: *Ararat*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Karamu*, *Night Terrors*, *Poet's Lore*, and *The Savannah Literary Journal*.

t.j. moran is a Southern California native who was educated primarily on the streets. He began writing because of a girl, and he continues to write today. He used to drink whiskey but now he drinks gin, and he loves God very much. The short story published in this issue won the McCann Short Story prize in 2006.

david pace is a professor in the Art Department at Santa Clara University.

rumit pancholi earned a BA in English from the University of Maryland, College Park, and is currently an MFA student in poetry at University of Notre Dame. Pancholi's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Banyan Review*, *Double Dare Press*, *Foliate Oaks*, *The Clemson Poetry Review*, *Gertrude*, *Tiptop Poetry Journal*, *Emerson Review*, among other places.

ana raab is senior communication major at Santa Clara University. Napping is her favorite pastime.

bethany reid has published poems, essays, and book reviews in regional and national journals, including *North Dakota Quarterly*, *santa clara review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Pontoon*, *Calyx*, *Studies in the Novel*, *The New England Quarterly*, and *Twins*. Her chapbook, *The Coyotes and My Mom*, was published in limited edition in 1990 by Bellowing Ark Press. She was co-winner in 2004 of the Lohmann Poetry Prize, and her poems have been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize. Bethany Reid is also the co-author, with Dr. Thomas M. Gaskin, of *Everett and Snohomish County* (Wyndham 2005). She lives in Edmonds, Washington, with her husband and three daughters.

liam satre-meloy is a junior communication major with a creative writing minor at Santa Clara University.

leslie santikian is a junior English major and creative writing minor at Santa Clara University. She is from Fresno, California, and loves to find beauty in the ordinary and stories from the everyday. She hopes to be a novel-writing author one day, but will settle for being able to finish a decent story every quarter or two. She lives regularly at Barnes & Noble where the staff know her by name and cheesecake order.

michael scofield received his MFA in writing from Vermont College in 2002. His second poetry collection, *Whirling Backward Into the World*, and his antiwar novel, *Acting Badly*, were published by Santa Fe's Sunstone Press. His poems have appeared or are scheduled to appear in *Cimarron Review*, *Comstock Review*, *thedrunkenboat*, and *Rhino*.

narasa shambhala has published poetry under several pen-names, but this pseudonym is his current favorite. He currently lives in the Pacific Northwest, where he spends his time writing poetry, teaching writing composition courses to undergraduate freshman, and perfecting curry recipes.

lauren swigart is a senior communication major at Santa Clara University.

j.l. torres has published stories and poems in many small journals and magazines, among them *Denver Quarterly*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The Bilingual Review*, *The Tulane Review*, *The Americas Review*, *The Connecticut Review*, *Wind*, *Puerto del Sol*, and the *Crab Orchard Review*. Born in Puerto Rico, raised in South Bronx, he teaches U.S. ethnic literature and creative writing at SUNY, Plattsburgh. Besides the PhD, he holds an MFA in creative writing from Columbia University. He is also the Managing Editor of the *Saranac Review*.

chris walker works only in photography, primarily using an 8x10" view camera and hand-printing in silver or platinum. As a photojournalist, he was part of a three-person team that won a finalist spot in the 2000 Pulitzers. His current work blends journalistic sensibilities with deeply-rooted concerns for America's rural cultures. Chris lives in Mt. Pulaski, Illinois—an hour south of Farmer City, but just a few miles north of Cornland.

santa clara review

A Journal of Poetry, Art, Fiction and Non-Fiction Since 1869



The **santa clara review** is published bi-annually, in February and May. Submissions are considered year-round.

For more information, contact the **santa clara review**:

Phone: (408) 554-4484, Fax: (408) 554-5544 or online at

www.santaclarareview.com/submit

subscribe now!

- ☐ One Year: \$10.00
- ☐ Two Years: \$19.00
(Postage Included)

santa clara review

500 El Camino Real,
Santa Clara, CA
95053-3212

*Please make all checks payable to the Santa Clara Review

A large, dark, stylized graphic of the letters 'I' and 'R' serves as the background for the top half of the page. The 'I' is a solid vertical bar, and the 'R' is a thick, curved shape that partially encloses the text 'INDIANA REVIEW'.

IR

INDIANA REVIEW

*Publishing innovative work by established
and emerging writers for 30 years.*

inreview@indiana.edu • www.indiana.edu/~inreview
Fiction • Nonfiction • Art • Poetry • Translation

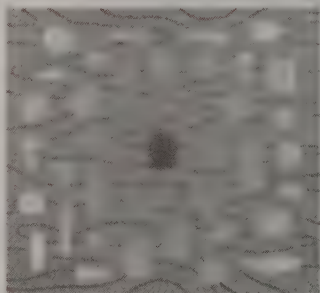
N O T R E D A M E r e v i e w

is an independent magazine of contemporary American and international fiction, poetry, and criticism. Each issue features a wide variety of authors, from Nobel laureates Seamus Heaney and Czeslaw Milosz to new voices. With over a decade of experience, we are dedicated to the fine art of symbiosis between writers and their publishers.

Creative Writing at Notre Dame

Our graduate Creative Writing Program is a two-year, literary immersion program that leads to the M.F.A. Each accepted student receives a full-tuition scholarship; several assistantships are also available, including the Sparks Fellowship. All students are given opportunities to work as editorial assistants on our national literary magazine, *The Notre Dame Review*. For more information, visit our website www.nd.edu/~alcwp

N O T R E D A M E r e v i e w



SIGNS & SURFACES



NUMBER 22
SUMMER 2010
\$8 U.S.
\$9.50 CANADA

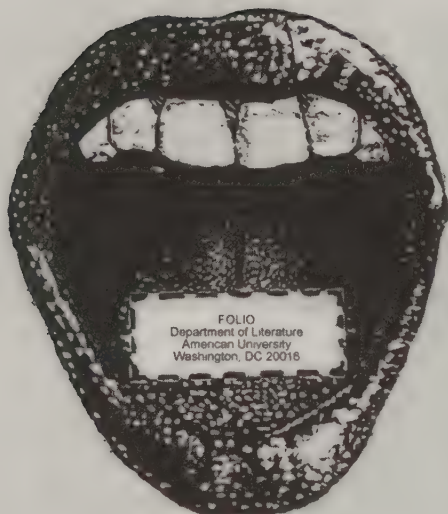
Subscriptions (Two Issues/Year)

\$15 individuals
\$20 institutions
\$8 single issue

Send check or money order to:

The Notre Dame Review
840 Flanner Hall
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556

or visit us at www.nd.edu/~ndr/review.htm



Folio is looking for work that ignites and endures, is artful yet natural, daring and elegant. We have previously published the work of Denise Duhamel, Virgil Suarez, and Patrick Rosal. Manuscripts are read between August 15 and March 1.

Acceptance pays in contributor copies.

Please send 4-6 poems or no more than 3,500 words of prose. We consider fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry and translations. Submissions should include a cover letter with a brief bio and a SASE for response. We do not return manuscripts unless specifically requested and with inclusion of specific postage. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable with notice. Please submit via postal mail to:

Folio

Department of Literature
American University
Washington, DC 20036

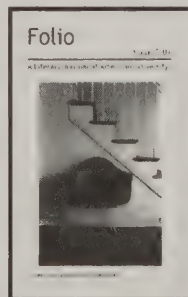
Subscriptions

\$12 / 1 year (2 issues)

\$20 / 2 years (4 issues)

Sample issues \$6 each

Please make checks payable to Folio: AU Department of Literature.



Questions? Contact us at folio_editors@yahoo.com.
Please visit our website: www.foliojournal.org



PHOEBE

a journal of literature and art

Recent and Upcoming Contributors:

Morgan McDermott

Ricardo Pau-Llosa

Noah Eli Gordon

Sesshu Foster

Gina Oschner

Lisa Fishman

Jeff Parker

Katie Ford

Tom Pow

Joshua Ferris

and other, emerging writers

poetry ∞ *fiction* ∞ *interviews* ∞ *photography* ∞ *art*

Phoebe sponsors annual Poetry and Fiction contests with a prize of \$1000. Deadline: December 1st

Send no more than 4 poems/10 pages or 1 story/25 pages. All writers submitting to the contest will receive the Fall issue, which will include the winning entries.

There is a \$15.00 reading fee (made out to Phoebe/George Mason University). Enclose SASE, fee, and cover sheet with name, short bio, and title(s) of entry. Your name and address should not appear anywhere on the poems or story.

Past contest judges include Ann Carson, Claudia Keelan, Nell Freudenberger, Carl Phillips, and Richard Ford.

Subscriptions are \$12 for one year (2 issues) or \$20 for two years (4 issues).

To subscribe or submit, send name and address with a check or money order to:

Phoebe

George Mason University
MSN 2D6, 4400 University Drive
Fairfax VA 22030

<http://www.gmu.edu/pubs/phoebe>

“Definitely a journal to keep watching.”

—*NewPages.com*

The Santa Clara University

department of

English
College of Arts & Sciences

**supports the
santa clara review**

For information
on the **English Major or Minor**,
or on department events and activities

Call: 408-554-4308

Fax: 408-554-4837

Email: cwentz@scu.edu

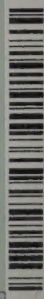
Located in

St. Joseph's Hall 209
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, CA, 95053

peered, and the sun shone down on the valley of Santa Clara in glorious splendor. In its delights, the day might well have rivalled the sunshiny moments of golden Italy. Not a boy of the heavy-College went to bed this evening whose mind was not occupied with the power of a hundred thoughts of the "turn out the lights" and the "Turkeys" on the morrow. A ritual service in the morning contributed going onwards to breakfast, a ceremonial of the day's enjoyment of us here were those that were used in the evening we were rather more than I could not follow the church theatre to witness a say, whether the performance was a dramatic or a musical. Anticipation of the morning was admirably put upon half-past nine o'clock. The first of the singer and the characters of the war flew in our ears, the music was well sustained. The following morning for the Cadets to their ranks. A song was as bright and as beautiful as light lunch having been enjoyed of the previous day had been with muskets stacked, the Cadets were in uniform with the color which the soldiers of the day had seen on the day of the day. After passing through the principal body the platoon of the day, the streets, the companies were united in a single line, the day of the day, fore the Catholic church and all the day of the day.

andrea justo
jon killoran
gareth lee
jeanne lohmann
jeff lopus
james lower
kelsey maher
michael minassian
t.j. moran
dustin nguyen
david pace
rumit pancholi
trung pham
ana raab
bethany reid
liam satre-meloy
leslie santikian
michael scofield
narasa shambhala
lauren swigart
robert tomlinson
j.l. torres
chris walker

jeffery alfier
amy marie baldwin
austin baumgarten
richard boada
joseph brennan
jeffrey brodtkin
jennifer bryan
patrick carrington
angie chau
mark clevenger
megan cutler
ross dakin
chad eschman
kellie flint
crystal friesen
don fritz
mark gee
steve gilson
jennifer gochoco
alexander hallett
katherine harper
kristen jaber



P9-BJH-986